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HIRAM BLAIR
by
DREW TUFTS

KE 3833

H. J. Hood.

HIRAM BLAIR



HIRAM BLAIR

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BY
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WITH FOUR ILLUSTRATIONS BY
H. S. DELAY



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CONTENTS

CHAPTER	PAGE
I THE HATE OF TWO CITIES	9
II LOVE'S UNREASONING DEMAND	18
III THE JEALOUSY OF TWO FAMILIES	21
IV THE PRACTICAL POLITICIAN COMES IN	29
V HIRAM BLAIR CAPITULATES	36
VI A PRESCRIPTION FOR A CANDIDATE	40
VII SAM HOUSTON IS MADE A STATESMAN	48
VIII THEY CONCILIATE MRS. HOUSTON	62
IX HIRAM EATS AN EXPENSIVE MEAL	65
X SAM HOUSTON BECOMES A CANDIDATE	70
XI WALTER'S CONSCIENCE GETS INTO ACTION	83
XII JOE SIMPSON IS ENLISTED IN THE CAUSE	87
XIII FLORENCE GETS HER FIRST LESSON IN POLITICS	98
XIV HIRAM AND WALTER GO PROSELYTING	98
XV GEORGE JENKINS GETS ON THE FENCE	105
XVI JOE SIMPSON LENDS A HAND	114
XVII ROSE JENKINS HAS HER TROUBLES TOO	122
XVIII ROSE JENKINS WARNS WALTER	134
XIX THE CAMPAIGN WARMS UP	139
XX POLITICS AND RELIGION	146
XXI HOW HIRAM TRIED TO BREAK INTO SO- CIETY	159

CONTENTS

CHAPTER	PAGE
XXII HINCKLEY AROUSES WALTER'S IRE . . .	165
XXIII HIRAM PLAYS WALTER A SHABBY TRICK .	178
XXIV WALTER HAS A NARROW ESCAPE . . .	190
XXV HOW THE NEWS WAS TOLD IN NEW BOS- TON	199
XXVI SQUIRE WATKINS GIVES A WARNING . .	207
XXVII THE BANNER TELLS THE STORY . . .	214
XXVIII WALTER REFUSES SOME GOOD ADVICE .	231
XXIX THE ATTACK IN THE NIGHT	235
XXX BILLY MCGEE IS CLEARED	249
XXXI TROUBLES BEGIN TO MULTIPLY	255
XXXII REVEREND MR. BILLINGS ENTERS THE STRUGGLE	265
XXXIII FLORENCE FINDS HERSELF IN DEEP WATERS	227
XXXIV THE TEMPTER APPEARS	286
XXXV THE STORM BREAKS	295
XXXVI WALTER MAKES A SERIOUS MISTAKE .	301
XXXVII THE PARTING OF THE WAYS	311
XXXVIII ROUNDING UP THE TOWNSHIP WORKERS .	325
XXXIX HIRAM TRIES TO CHEER UP WALTER . .	333
XL THE ARREST OF BUCK JACKSON	339
XLI THE EXHILARATING INFLUENCE OF POLI- TICS	352
XLII FLORENCE HEARS OF ROSE'S TRIP . . .	364
XLIII IN THE THICK OF THE FIGHT	373
XLIV A DISAPPEARANCE	378
XLV RECEIVING THE RETURNS	386
XLVI ROSE JENKINS GETS A LETTER	408

CONTENTS

CHAPTER	PAGE
XLVII ON THE TRAIL OF THE FUGITIVE . . .	410
XLVIII A RACE WITH DEATH	419
XLIX GETTING OUT OF WALTONVILLE . . .	428
L IN THE SICK CHAMBER	433
LI THE CLOUDS ROLL BY	439

ILLUSTRATIONS

	PAGE
Hiram Blair	<i>Frontispiece</i>
“Go out and do your worst”	120
“If you insult me, I cannot bear it”	322
A gleam of intelligence sprang for an instant into his eyes	488

HIRAM BLAIR

CHAPTER I

THE HATE OF TWO CITIES

IT ain't no use, Walt, us Morrison people is pizen to these here New Bosting folks, an' you kain't ever git them to feelin' friendly. You mought ez well try to make friends with a nest of rattlesnakes."

Hiram Blair, Sheriff of Douglas County, Indiana, was sitting on the court-house steps at New Boston as he delivered this ultimatum to his bosom friend, Walter Crane, in response to the latter's suggestion that the prejudice between the two cities was unnecessary and ought to be wiped out. Hiram filled his corncob pipe, searched his pockets for a match and finding none, reached over for Crane's cigar without either request or resistance, lighted his pipe and resumed:

HIRAM BLAIR

"You 've only ben in Douglas Keounty a little while, Walt, an' you don't understan' this thing. I wuz raised out there six mile from Morrison an' I kin tell you this hatin' bizness is in the blood. Why, my boy, the people of these two towns hez ben eddycatin' their children to hate the children of the other town for years. Ef you think you kin wipe it out I tell you, you 'll bite off more 'n you kin chaw."

"But, Hiram," persisted Crane, "the people of both towns are human beings, just as other people are, and the milk of human kindness runs through their veins the same as others. There is no sensible reason for this prejudice. Morrison is too large to be injured by anything that New Boston may do, and New Boston cannot suffer because of any good that may come to Morrison."

"Ef there 's any of the kind of milk you 're talkin' about runnin' through New Bosting people it sours whenever they think of a Morrison feller. Walt, I 've tried 'em since I come up here to be Sheriff, an' I know 'em. They 'll git you the fust chanst. I 've heerd it said somers thet lovers an' fools don't never see trouble till

THE HATE OF TWO CITIES

it lands on 'em, an' I reckon you 've got one of them ailments, ef not both."

Crane blushed and turned away abruptly. He could not accustom himself to Hiram's uncouth method of expression, and besides he knew that when the Sheriff dropped into this blunt speech, there was no room for further argument.

Hiram Blair and Walter Crane presented a strange contrast as they got up and walked away together. Walter had changed the subject and they were talking earnestly. Hiram Blair was the typical Indiana countryman, tall, lank, awkward in bearing, but possessing great strength in his loosely hung limbs. He had a shrewd, half-humorous look in his eyes that redeemed his face from the expression of the green countryman, and his mouth and chin betrayed the strength of character that underlay his unprepossessing exterior. He was dressed like a farmer, with ill-fitting gray clothes and a wide-brimmed white felt hat such as is nearly always worn by the country Sheriff.

His companion, on the contrary, was dressed neatly and in style, but not expensively. He was of striking appearance, though there was no

HIRAM BLAIR

attempt at studied effect in his make-up. He stood six feet tall and weighed close to two hundred pounds, compactly built and having the bearing of the well-trained college athlete. Walter Crane's beardless face was ruddy with good health and buoyant with the confidence of youth. He would be styled a handsome man, though he disliked to have his personal appearance spoken of in his presence and appeared to be modestly unaware of his attractiveness.

The cause of the colloquy which had ended in disagreement was the intense rivalry and bitterness between the two cities of Morrison and New Boston, the former the metropolis and the latter the county-seat of Douglas County, Indiana. New Boston had been settled in the early days by pioneers from Massachusetts. They brought with them their Puritan ways and held sacred the ideals they worshipped in their eastern homes. The first settlers all came from a section only a few miles square, and when they joined in the redemption of the West, they cherished fondly the belief that the staid customs of New England could be transplanted to the new country. When they found that this was not

THE HATE OF TWO CITIES

possible they were shocked but not dismayed. They could not compel their new neighbors to follow their example, but they could rigidly adhere to the tenets and teachings of their fathers even though the world around them should persist in running wild.

The growth of the western country forced into New Boston a population more complex than was relished by the original settlers, but they still held the upper hand. Succeeding generations modified the rigid observance of the ancient customs, but they accepted without question the teaching that they whose ancestors had been reared in the shadow of Bunker Hill were superior to their less fortunate brothers, and should so conduct themselves as to emphasize this superiority. When a true son of New Boston referred to that section of our land which he affectionately described as "back east," his hand would involuntarily move toward his hat and his voice would take on a tone calculated to inspire his hearer with awe and admiration.

At the time we first become interested in the people of New Boston it had reached the age of

HIRAM BLAIR

fifty years and had a population of fifteen hundred. This was in the year 1884.

Morrison, ten miles away, was a railroad and manufacturing town. Its people had followed the C. I. & N. Railroad when it was first built. A division was established at Morrison and shops located. Men came there from all parts of the country. They came to work and no man was ever asked who his father was. The only aristocracy in Morrison was the aristocracy of muscle and of endurance. Before many years the G. & N. Railroad crossed the C. I. & N. at Morrison. The city's growth from that time was rapid, until its population ranged from seven to ten thousand, according to who was giving the information.

Walter Crane had located in Morrison something over four years before this history opens, just after finishing his course at law school. He had no friends in the city but had found what he thought was a favorable opening. His parents were too poor to help him even if he had settled near his old home in Pennsylvania, so he struck out for himself and had worked up to a fair position in the practice. In addition, he

THE HATE OF TWO CITIES

had made his way successfully into a sort of leadership in the politics of Morrison.

Hiram Blair's last remark gave an idea of the reason for Walter Crane's desire that the prejudice which had grown up between the cities should be wiped out. He was, in truth, a lover, and the lady of his heart lived in New Boston.

Among those who came to New Boston with the first little colony was Richard Bassett, then a lad of twelve years. He had grown to manhood, married the daughter of one of the first families, and had retired after acquiring a comfortable fortune. He was an uncompromising easterner and taught his children to look to the East for what was most perfect. He had, however, organized a company in the Civil War, mostly of westerners, and when he came out a Colonel after three years' gallant service, he had lost much of the exclusiveness of his earlier years, though retaining all his austerity and aristocratic poise. Colonel Bassett paid but little attention to the town rivalry. He had made his competency before Morrison was on the map, and it so happened that certain of his farms were situated so close to Morrison that the

HIRAM BLAIR

growth of the city greatly enhanced their value. Therefore he listened to the sneers of his neighbors at the new and low-bred railroad town with good-natured complaisance, but rarely joined in the attack.

Florence Bassett, his only daughter, had been broken away from the ideals and prejudices of her companions in New Boston by reason of having attended a young ladies' seminary in a western city. Her parents would have greatly preferred Wellesley, but the fact that an aunt lived in the western college town induced them, after many a heartache, to accede to her tearful pleadings that she should not be sent so far away from home and among strangers. It was not long before the girls made life a burden for Miss Bassett whenever she mentioned the East, and she at length reached the very sensible conclusion that we are all men and brothers no matter whence we hail.

The first time Florence met Walter Crane she was curious to see what manner of man could live in Morrison, and she was so pleasantly astonished at his gentlemanly bearing that the reflex action from her former prejudices filled

THE HATE OF TWO CITIES

her with thoughts that threatened her peace of mind.

All my readers have, I trust, had a love-story of their own. Why should I then attempt to tell the story of one love among millions, when I know less how to tell it than the reader? Suffice it to say that when our story finds Hiram and Walter on the court-house steps discussing the bitter feeling of the two cities, matters had progressed so far that the gossips of New Boston were agreed there was great danger that "Florence Bassett would throw herself away on that no-account Morrison lawyer."

CHAPTER II

LOVE'S UNREASONING DEMAND

“**I**N love and in politics at one and the same time. That’s a nice predicament for a struggling young lawyer, but I suppose I’m in for it. I’ve given my promise.”

Walter Crane was talking to himself as he drove toward home about midnight on the Sunday after his talk with Hiram Blair on the court-house steps. He had dragged himself away from Florence Bassett after she had made a demand upon him that perturbed him greatly, especially as he had been persuaded into making her a promise. He resolutely sought to turn his thoughts into the building of pleasant plans for the future, but no matter how much he exerted his will he was powerless to prevent the disturbance of this joyous mood by the realization that he had committed himself to the accomplishment of an apparently impossible task.

Hastily made promises given unthoughtedly

LOVE'S UNREASONING DEMAND

have done more harm and good in the world than any other human influence. Much of the world's progress has been due to the resolute determination of men who have persisted in doing the impossible because they had said they would. Much of the misery that has come to mankind has been brought on by the refusal of men to be swerved from the course they had laid out. As Walter Crane drove slowly homeward this night he made up his mind a dozen times that he had pledged himself to an act of folly, and that he would in the morning write Florence Bassett a long letter explaining the utter unwisdom of the promise he had given her and beg her to release him from his pledge. He thought out in detail the many arguments he would set out with unassailable logic in this letter, and when he would get to the end of the letter he would try to frame an endearing phrase to close it with — how cold and heartless it would be to him then! No loving words, such as he usually delighted to employ in saying good-bye, would fit in with the freezing logic of his letter. He would keep his promise.

The gray of dawn was just appearing in the

HIRAM BLAIR

east as he approached the river at the outskirts of Morrison. Before his horse struck the bridge Walter pulled it up and sat in the buggy thinking. In his mind he called the river before him the Rubicon and determined not to turn back when once he should pass over the bridge, no matter which way he might decide. At length he roused up, touched the horse lightly with the whip and again spoke aloud:

"I can't write that letter. If Florence's pleading eyes come before me, I'll burn it, I know. I'll have to take the chance. I'll not ask her to release me. I've crossed the Rubicon."

As the sun rose that morning it looked upon a foolish lad who was happy in the belief that because his sweetheart had asked him and he had promised, he could overthrow a political dynasty which had been safely entrenched in Douglas County for twenty years, successfully resisting the attacks of older, wiser and stronger men.

CHAPTER III

THE JEALOUSY OF TWO FAMILIES

COLONEL BASSETT was a Republican of the most pronounced type. He had been quite active in the political affairs of Douglas County in earlier days, though the heavy Democratic majorities kept him from ever holding office. When he retired from business, he also retired from personal work in political contests and contented himself with diligent reading of Republican newspapers and quarrelling amiably with every Democrat who could be inveigled into an argument with him.

The Bassett family had always been prominent in the affairs of Douglas County, and its leadership in the social doings of New Boston was shared only with the family of "Senator" David Hinckley, a Democrat as uncompromising in his views of political matters as was Colonel Bassett. Senator Hinckley was of an old Virginia family, and when he located in Indiana before

HIRAM BLAIR

the war, at once obtained an *entrée* into the exclusive circles of New Boston by reason of the close affiliation between Massachusetts and Virginia. For many years he had represented Douglas County in the Legislature of Indiana, going from the House to the Senate, to which body he was returned three times. Four years prior to the opening of this story he had climbed another round on the official ladder. The death of the Congressman from his District opened the way for him, and by trading his seat in the Senate to a leading Democrat of the next largest county he had managed to secure a seat in Congress with but little effort. Having an eye upon still greater honors Hinckley encouraged the people of Douglas County to continue calling him "Senator." There is no title by which a member of the lower house of Congress can be readily designated, and it is essential that a public official shall have a title or "handle" to his name. The designation of a title by the word "handle" is not slang in any sense but is an eminently proper use of the word. A handle is the thing one takes hold of when he wishes to move an article in a dignified yet easy manner.

JEALOUSY OF TWO FAMILIES

As the handle is the only part of an article which can be taken hold of in a dignified yet familiar manner, so is a title the only dignified and familiar part of a prominent man's name which can be used in addressing him. The friends and neighbors of Congressman Hinckley called him "Senator" at home, and those who sought his favor in Washington never failed thus to address him.

Senator Hinckley's two daughters were votaries of society. Every winter when he went to Indianapolis they would spend several weeks in society at the capital, and when they returned to New Boston they regaled their girl companions with wonderful stories of the gay times they had enjoyed. Two winters in Washington had served to give them still greater opportunities to arouse the demon of jealousy in the hearts of the New Boston girls with descriptions of the splendid social functions of the nation's capital city. The Hinckley girls took advantage of every occasion to relate with graphic emphasis the splendors of social life in Washington, and in that delicate feminine manner which conceals the thorn beneath the rose, express their

HIRAM BLAIR

commiseration for the unfortunate ones who had never enjoyed the blessing of entrance into its sacred precincts.

A few days before the Sunday night which found Walter Crane at the Bassett home, when a coterie of girls, including Florence Bassett, were dilating upon the pleasures of a social gathering of the previous evening, Ruth Hinckley, with a patronizing smile, said in her sweetest tones:

"Oh, yes, it was perfectly lovely for New Boston, but you girls will never know what it is to have a really glorious time unless you go to dear old Washington."

Such remarks, sowed plentifully, brought forth fruit abundantly in the jealousy that grew up in the hearts of the New Boston girls. This it was which was responsible for the request upon Walter Crane that filled his thoughts with doubts and fears as he journeyed home in the early hours of Monday morning.

For the love of Florence Bassett had made Walter Crane a hero to her. When they had the parlor to themselves she lost but little time in opening her batteries.

JEALOUSY OF TWO FAMILIES

"Walter, you Democrats must defeat Mr. Hinckley for renomination to Congress."

Walter was astounded. They had never talked of politics. On several occasions when the family were all present Colonel Bassett had endeavored to engage Walter in political arguments, but he had diplomatically warded off the Colonel's advances, knowing that unless he permitted the old warrior to come off victorious he would have a mortal enemy where he needed a firm friend. Recognizing that Florence's education had all tended to lead her to fixed opinions on politics antagonistic to his, he had carefully avoided the subject in all their intercourse, so he was totally unprepared for this sudden outburst and answered it hastily:

"Defeat Hinckley! Why, my dear, you know that is impossible."

"Now, Walter love, don't say that. You know nothing is really impossible when you make up your mind to do it. The arrogance of those Hinckley girls since their father has gone to Washington is intolerable, and I can't endure it."

"Florence, Senator Hinckley has carried this

HIRAM BLAIR

county without an opposing candidate the last three times he has been nominated, and your party has made no genuine effort to defeat him. This county is strong enough in the district to control, and everybody concedes that his position in Douglas County is invulnerable. It would be foolhardy to attempt to persuade any one to make the race against him. It just can't be done, darling."

"That is just it," persisted Florence. "He feels so safe in his place that the entire family lord it over all New Boston as if he were Governor. Only last week Mamie Hinckley told me what they are going to do next winter when 'papa goes back to Washington.' All the girls in my set, and most of them have Democratic fathers and brothers, will do all they can to help keep Mamie's father from going back to Washington."

"Florence, Senator Hinckley can go out in this little old town of yours and snap his fingers, and every one of those fathers and brothers would be running after him to know what they can do for him. Practical politics, little girl,

JEALOUSY OF TWO FAMILIES

is managed a good deal differently from a young ladies' club."

"Now, Walter, don't get sarcastic; save that for the police courts in your wicked big city. Even if Mr. Hinckley can carry New Boston there are other places in the county, and I've often heard papa say that his record is so bad the Democrats could defeat him easily if they would make a fight against him. Morrison is so much larger than New Boston, you would have that advantage. Please do this for me, Walter, if you really love me. I am sure you can, for you always do the things you start out to do."

There were tears in the beautiful eyes Florence turned toward Walter, and these with her sublime confidence in him were too much for the practical side of his nature, so he capitulated.

"Very well, Florence, I'll try it. It is a good deal like trying to make water run up hill, and if I fail you must not be disappointed."

"You will not fail, dearest; I am perfectly happy now. I can be as sweet as peaches and cream the next time I meet Ruth Hinckley. I

HIRAM BLAIR

am going to persuade her to tell me all her plans for her next social season in Washington, then write them down so I can remember them until after the election."

"Senator Hinckley will go back to Washington for the short session next winter whether he is re-elected or not."

"Will he?" There was a shade of disappointment in Florence's voice, but it quickly disappeared. "But he will never take the girls back with him if he is defeated. They never carry withered flowers to the inaugural ball, do they?"

Florence Bassett was a sweet-tempered, generous-hearted girl, richly deserving of the love of a noble-minded man such as Walter Crane, yet she was not above the weaknesses of human nature.

CHAPTER IV

THE PRACTICAL POLITICIAN COMES IN

WHEN Walter Crane located in Morrison there was a dearth of political workers in that city and its politics was at the mercy of the leaders at the county-seat. Being a lawyer he was looked upon as a natural leader and he easily reached a position of undisputed control in Morrison. He was a ready, gifted speaker and having a natural adaptability to political work he soon learned the ins and outs of the political game as it was then being played in Indiana.

He felt sure that Morrison could be depended on to go solidly against Hinckley, but that was not enough. Of other parts of the county he knew little, and he had only a hazy idea of what he had undertaken as he threw himself into his bed for a few hours' rest.

Monday morning when Walter awoke, he had a strange feeling that he did n't know where he

HIRAM BLAIR

was. His room looked familiar. The bureau with its drawers and the missing handles was in its proper place. There was the washstand bearing its burden of bowl and pitcher and towels hanging along its side. Everything was where he expected to see it, yet he did n't feel as if he was in his room.

"What is the matter with me this morning?" he exclaimed aloud as he jumped out of bed and buried his face in the cold water. This brought his wandering faculties into play, and he answered his own question. "Oh, yes! I'm a different man this morning. I've crossed the Rubicon."

Mrs. Dougherty, Walter's kind-hearted, Irish landlady, knocked at his door, and called to him:

"Mister Crane, hev yez brought some wan wid yez for breakfast? And it's been waitin' an hour."

Walter laughed gleefully. "No, Mrs. Dougherty, I was only talking to myself so I'd be sure of an intelligent audience. I'll be out in just a minute."

Mrs. Dougherty went back to the kitchen muttering, "Talkin' to his own self, was he? Faith,

THE POLITICIAN COMES IN

an' it seems like when a laad 's in love, there 's two of him, an' wan talks to the ither."

Walter put in all that day studying out plans for his daring enterprise. It was so far beyond the ideas of men as to possibilities that he dare not take any one into his confidence, so he determined to figure out a line of action without asking for advice. At times he had visions of Walter Crane sitting in the seats of the mighty at Washington, and this vision persisted in coming back to him. Yet he fought it off valiantly. He knew that Indiana was a doubtful State, where "floaters" were an all-important factor in politics, and a poor man had no chance to win. Finally he reached the conclusion that a candidate must be found who did not live in Morrison, but there he reached the end of the plans he was able to fix upon unaided. When evening came he was in the depths of despair, ready to go back to Florence and beg her to withdraw her demand. Depression held him a victim. He felt dull, disconsolate, powerless. After supper he walked out into the bracing air to see if a walk would revive his spirits. Paying no heed to where his footsteps led, he was somewhat startled

HIRAM BLAIR

when he beheld just ahead of him the bridge over the river at the outskirts of Morrison. The sight of it and the gently flowing river inspired Walter with renewed courage and again he spoke aloud:

"I've crossed the Rubicon! I know now what I'll do. I will see Hiram Blair in the morning."

Hiram Blair had given Walter his first case when he located in Morrison. He was a horse trader, and had become involved in a dispute over a trade. His shrewdness in taking advantage of any point in his favor in making the trade, and withal his scrupulous honesty in his dealings with Walter had appealed to the young lawyer. In the trial Walter had secured from the other litigant an admission that Blair had made no untruthful statement in his trade, but it was the way he acted and what he did n't say that deceived the other trader. The jury decided for Blair, who with the enthusiasm which was his chief characteristic, declared the credit was due to the skilful handling of the case. He became a fast friend of Walter's and never lost an opportunity to aid him.

About the time Walter came to Morrison,

THE POLITICIAN COMES IN

Blair had drifted into politics by being placed in charge of his school district. He liked the game, and as he was energetic he was given all the work he could do organizing parades, torch-light processions, getting up school-house meetings, and taking speakers out into the country to the meetings. He and Walter soon began to work together, Hiram seeking Walter's advice on every matter and sometimes following it. Walter discovered ere long that Hiram was a veritable diamond in the rough; that underneath his rugged, uncouth exterior was a wealth of hard sense, and as kind and true a heart as ever beat. They were much together, though Hiram was several years Walter's senior, and many a talk they had in their boyish way over what they hoped to do in the future. Hiram was ambitious but he had not nerved himself to the point of even thinking of aspiring to a county office, until one day in the early part of the campaign of 1882, the friends of one of the candidates for Sheriff conceived the idea that if they could get out a candidate in Morrison who would not be a factor in the fight, he would take away from the strength of their candidate's opponent.

HIRAM BLAIR

They picked on Hiram Blair and went to see him. Hiram listened to their urging with calmness, but all the while he was making up his mind to run. The arguments they offered were hollow and insincere, he knew, but his vanity was tickled by the thought that these veteran politicians considered him of sufficient importance even to serve their purpose.

The next morning he walked into Walter Crane's office, threw two or three open law books off a chair on to the floor, took possession of the chair, and blurted out:

"Walt, I b'leeve I 'm running for Sheriff."

Walter was busy picking up the scattered books and marking the places where they had been open, so he had time to get his face straightened out before Hiram had a square look at it.

"You say you believe you are?"

"Yes; you see, Walt, ol' Jim Hicks an' Joe Long an' George Foster come down from New Bosting last night to git me to run, but they air fer Andy Root and want me to run just to divide up the fellers that 's ag'in' him. I did n't give them any satisfaction, but I've thought it over sence an' hev just about come to the conclusion

THE POLITICIAN COMES IN

that this here torchlight business hez gone fur enough; I want some of the spoils. These fellers don't think I'll cut any figger in the fight, an' mebbe I won't, but a feller won't never git anything in politics onless he asks fer it. I've druv in four steers an' am calkilatin' to sell 'em, then put my name in the papers. Leastways, that's the way I've made up my mind onless you kin talk me out of it."

When Hiram left Morrison that afternoon he had in his pockets most of the money the steers sold for, and his announcement as a candidate for Sheriff in the newspapers. Walter became his most ardent and valuable supporter, and was his trusted counsellor. He surprised all the old heads of his party by making a canvass remarkable for industry and ingenuity. When the convention was held, with the aid of Walter's clever management, he was nominated. His election followed as a matter of course.

It was, therefore, to Hiram Blair, Sheriff of Douglas County, that Walter decided to turn in this his hour of extreme need.

CHAPTER V

HIRAM BLAIR CAPITULATES

THE first train from Morrison to New Boston Tuesday morning carried Walter Crane. On arriving at the county-seat he went straightway to the court-house, where he found Hiram Blair smoking contentedly in the Sheriff's office. Taking Hiram into the private office Walter flung himself into a chair and turned on the Sheriff a countenance which expressed at once unutterable woe and fierce determination. Blair was alarmed, and anxiously inquired, "What is it, Walt? You kin hev anything but money."

"Well, Hiram, to tell it all at once, we Democrats have got to beat Dave Hinckley for Congress."

"Say, Walt, you hain't took to drinkin' before breakfast, hev you?"

Walter laughed off this sally, but continued earnestly: "I did my best to ward it off, Hiram,

HIRAM BLAIR CAPITULATES

but I could n't. I 've promised Florence Bassett we 'd try to defeat him."

"Is that the gal you 're goin' to marry?"

"Yes, provided we succeed in this thing. She has set her heart on it, and made me promise her Sunday night."

"Too hifalutin' to suit her? Jealous, is she?"

"That is about it. The girls put on airs and she thinks they are so arrogant it is her duty to have them taken down a notch or two."

"Walt, my boy, I 'm surprised at you! You and me has always agreed that wimmen suffrage would be the ruination of this country, and now the fust time you fall in love, you 've gone clean over to the other side. There 's suthin loose in your head; you won't do."

"Hi, when you took the fool notion to run for Sheriff and tied your steers at the hitch rack in front of my office, I thought you would n't get votes enough to organize a men's prayer meeting, but I stuck to you. We accomplished the impossible then, can't we do the same thing again?"

"That 's so, my boy; that 's so. It did seem mighty like starting a three minit hoss in a two-

HIRAM BLAIR

forty class, and I 'll never forgit how you stood up fer me. Say, Walt, I don't b'leeve I know this gal o' yourn. How does she look?"

"She is tall and slender, with form as perfect and graceful as a fawn; erect, queenly carriage; walks along as if she did n't see any one in sight until she recognizes you, then her smile is as sweet and bright as the sun breaking through the clouds on a summer day. Her countenance is clear, with just enough color to give it tone; even, regular features, honest brown eyes that look straight into yours, and almost hypnotize you. A fair, high forehead, and a magnificent profusion of dark brown hair."

"Jehosaphat! An' she wants Ol' Dave's scalp? Ef I could only see her, I b'leeve I 'd be a wimmen suffrage lunatic, too. Don't s'pose you 'd want to bring her down here an' let her hypnotize me, too, before we begin this job?"

"There might be some trouble about that, as she has a horror of the court-house, but if you will go out to the house with me —"

"No, my wife ain't quite used to the ways of sassiety, and ef I went callin' on young wimmen it would take a heap of explainin'. But you go

HIRAM BLAIR CAPITULATES

out an' tell her you an' me hez her orders under advisement an' ef we kin hunt up a hoss that is in Uncle Dave's class, we 'll put him on the track ag'in' the Senytor. Just fix thet up in parlor langwidge, Walt. Now run along; I must go over to the jail an' measure out the grub fer the prisoners. I always tend to thet myself, fer ef they got too much it mought be an encouragement to crime, an' besides I only git fifty cents a day fer feedin' 'em."

Walter felt that his impossible task was as ready half finished, for he knew the indomitable energy and determination of his friend, as well as the great power of the Sheriff's office in a political fight. So he went to see Florence with a light heart, and made her happy by relating in glowing terms the progress that had been made.

But his trouble had just begun.

CHAPTER VI

A PRESCRIPTION FOR A CANDIDATE

THE fust thing to do is to git a candidate."

This was Hiram Blair's greeting when Walter found him that afternoon.

"It ain't goin' to be easy, fer nobody hez any idee ol' Dave kin be beat. You hain't anybody in mind, hev you?"

Walter admitted that his mind was a perfect blank on that point.

"Well, before we go any further, we must fix up a perscription of the kind of a man we want. He must not live in New Bosting, fer they'll ride anybody out er town on a rail that goes after the ol' man. He kain't cum from Morri-son either, fer we kin git the votes down there by playin' on the town prejudice."

"I think he ought to come from the west part of the county, from Medora, Sparksburg, Houston or some of those towns," ventured Walter,

PREScription FOR A CANDIDATE

anxious to agree with Hiram on every possible point.

"Yes, anywhere over there. But it don't make so much difference after we leave Morrison an' New Bosting, where he comes frum, so long 's he fills the perscription. He hez got to be rich, not very much sense, a fair looker, kinder solid lookin', ought to be a farmer, member of the Campbellite Church, an' above all, he must be stingy."

"Stingy! Why in the world should he be stingy? I thought we wanted a liberal man."

"That shows your inexperience in runnin' fer office in the country, Walt. Our man must be stingy, powerful stingy, fer a liberal man thet hez no more sense than to run for Congriss ag'in' Dave Hinckley would never be able to dodge the poor-house. He must be rich, an' to be rich he hez just got to be stingy. When you put a downright stingy man to runnin' fer office an' git him to goin' good, he will spend his money even faster than the liberal feller, an' he don't know how to spend it hisself, so he has to let you spend it for him. Thet way, we git the long green ourselves an' know it will be intelligently handled.

HIRAM BLAIR

He must b'long to the Campbellite Church, or we will hev every preacher of that church threatenin' their members with several new kinds of damnation ef they don't vote fer Ol' Dave Hinckley."

"I think I see the wisdom of your ideas, but you have made a prescription that is going to be very hard to fill. Let's get poll lists of the townships on the west side of the county and run through them. In that way some name may be suggested to us."

Hiram fell in with this idea, and for more than an hour they took up name after name, discussed it and each time found objections. At length, Hiram, after studying one name intently for several moments, suddenly jumped to his feet, dancing around the room and shouting:

"Uricky! Uricky! Uricky! I've got him — Sam Houston — He's the man we want, an' he'll run, too, mark my words."

Had it not been for the conventions, Walter would have dropped to his knees and worshipped Hiram as he danced about the room in joy of his discovery. Hiram became quiet at last and explained:

PREScription FOR A CANDIDATE

"Sam Houston is the richest man in his township, an' hez been a member of the keounty board frekwently. He is chairman of it now. Way back he went to the Legislature at Indianapolis onct, but he was in Ol' Dave's way, an' he shelved him. He hez been sore on Hinckley ever sence. I helped him git the keounty board chairmanship. He supported me fer Sheriff 'cause I made him think I wuz goin' to fight the court-house ring. He's dead set fer turnin' rascals out. We kin make him our candidate, but we must handle him mighty tender."

Hiram walked to the door of the private office and called to the Deputy Sheriff, who was in the outer room:

"Joe, hitch up Jennie an' Jack to the rig right away, an' ef any one asks fer me tell 'em I've gone to Langford to serve some papers."

Turning back to Walter—"We'll go right out an' see Sam. On the way we'll fix up what to say to him an' to his wife. You go on out to your gal's house an' I'll pick you up there, so's these New Bosting folks won't see us start out together."

Safely out of New Boston, Hiram, who had

HIRAM BLAIR

been in silent thought all the while, turned to Walter with:

"Say, boy, did you ever fish fer trout?"

"Oh, yes, when I was a boy back in Pennsylvania; it's fine sport."

"So I've heerd. I never tried it myself, but from what I've heerd about it, you ain't never sure you've got your fish until you've got him cooked. This here enterprise we're on is mighty like fishin' fer trout. I hev to keep a thinkin' of your discription of that gal to prevent bein' sorry I ever took a hand in it."

Walter had been doing some thinking, too. He replied: "I know it is a large undertaking, Hiram, and there is great danger of failure; but you must remember you hold the most important and influential office in the county. You are a young man who can and will make a place for yourself in the world of politics. The way for you to do this is to assert yourself now and compel these old leaders to recognize you. You have the intelligence and grit; as for knowledge of the practical side of politics you have the advantage of all of them. So long as Hinckley has the upper hand in Douglas County he will

PREScription FOR A CANDIDATE

keep you down. He has shown his determination to keep you from being recognized in many ways. You can only make your way in the affairs of Douglas County and the State by breaking down the power of Senator Hinckley. If you succeed in keeping Dave Hinckley out of Congress, and I feel sure you will, Hiram Blair will be counted as the most powerful man in the county, and your fame will spread throughout the State."

Hiram gazed at Walter with a quizzical expression, but underneath it was a glow of pleased satisfaction. He only said:

"Yes, my boy, you hev been a trout fisherman, all right."

Several miles were traversed in silence, broken finally by Walter:

"Now, let's fix up what we are going to say to Mr. Houston."

"I thought you was rehearsin' a while back when you wuz stringin' me," grimly responded Hiram. "That's the kind of talk to give him, but leave that mostly to me. You'll have to look after the old lady an' the gals. Wimmen is your long suit. When I run down an' hev

HIRAM BLAIR

to ketch my breath you watch Sam, an' ef he acts like he is goin' to buck, you pitch in an' talk like a threshin' machine till I git rested up. But leave the heavy work on Sam to me. Flattery will bring him, an' I 'll pour it into him so fast he 'll think he's a real statesman before I 'm half through with him."

"Suppose he asks how much it is going to cost?"

"There's where you kin cut in ag'in. Be very keerful what you say, though. Don't frighten him, an' don't ever for the life of you fix a limit. Jist talk easy like, namin' a modest amount kinder off hand, an' leave it mighty loose at both ends, specially the fur end. When we git him hitched up an' on the track, we 'll manage to lighten his purse so 's it won't handicap him none comin' down the home-stretch. You see, Walt, you had better do this talkin', 'cause I 'll hev to touch him up fer the stuff when the fast goin' comes, an' I 'd best not commit myself too peart for a economical campaign. You take the economy part now, an' I 'll tend to the other end when the time comes."

PREScription FOR A CANDIDATE

"What is your idea about the ladies; will they get into it?"

"Great guns! boy, we must n't never leave Sam's house until we git him to send his name to the paper. That's what we air goin' out there fer. We kain't never clinch it until there hez been a fam'ly council, an' fer all I know fam'ly prayers. Whatever they hev, we've got to stay with 'em; you must prime yourself for the wimmen, sure. They air very religious, an' after you've convinced 'em they will enjoy livin' in Washington, you'll hev to show 'em that it is Sam's Christian duty to help along the cause of reform an' purity in politics by keepin' Ol' Dave at home where he won't be tempted. The Senytor, he gits a little top-heavy sometimes, you know, an' Mrs. Houston is turrible fer temperance."

CHAPTER VII

SAM HOUSTON IS MADE A STATESMAN

AS they drove up the lane through the rows of stately maple trees that fringed the approach to Samuel Houston's home, they saw him going across the back lot to the house from the barn. A big Newfoundland dog came bounding down the road in friendly greeting, and Mr. Houston was not far behind. He met them with the cordial hospitality always present when persons from the city make visits to farmers.

"Good evenin', Mr. Sheriff, good evenin', mighty glad to see you; light an' come in. Leave the hosses, the boys will put 'em up."

By this time Hiram and Walter had alighted from the buggy and Hiram was giving Mr. Houston a specimen of the hearty hand-shake which had made him friends all over the county. Hiram Blair had to a remarkable degree that happy faculty of making people believe he was

HOUSTON IS MADE A STATESMAN

delighted to see them. He was under full steam as he said:

"Powerful glad to see you, Mr. Houston, and to see you lookin' so well. Hard work must agree with you. Shake hands with Walter Crane, of Morrison; Mr. Crane is one of our brightest young lawyers, I s'pose you know about him."

"Yes," replied Houston, shaking hands with Walter somewhat more formally than with Hiram. "I recollect hearin' Mr. Crane make a speech over at the schoolhouse last fall; right good speech it wuz, too."

One of Mr. Houston's sons was appearing around the corner of the house and the farmer called out:

"Here, Bill, put up the Sheriff's hosses, an' feed 'em. Now, Sheriff, you an' Mr. Crane come right on in the house. Mrs. Houston will have supper ready before long."

Hiram expostulated, declaring they could only stop a short time, and insisted that the young man should not put up the horses. Walter stood gravely watching this play, and Bill Houston, who seemed to understand it fully, marched

HIRAM BLAIR

back to the barn with the team without hesitation.

Mr. Houston lived on a farm whose appearance betokened thrift. Two barns, both larger than the house, stood in the lot, and the cattle-sheds, granary and well-kept farm machinery gave evidence that Sam Houston was a business farmer. His house was of no small proportions, though the barns were larger. It was built for use and not for show, two stories high, with ample living rooms and a wing containing rooms for hired men. It was a farmhouse typical of those maintained by the prosperous farmers of that time. It was square built, painted white, the only ornamentation or relief being the wide veranda stretching along the front, to which Mr. Houston led his guests as soon as Hiram had gone through the customary formula of declining to remain.

When they were seated in the comfortable chairs in the grateful shade, Mr. Houston opened the conversation with —

“What ’s the news in town?”

“Nothin’ startlin’, I reckon,” replied Hiram

HOUSTON IS MADE A STATESMAN

genially; "jus' joggin' along 'bout ez usual. Politics is livenin' up a little."

"Your time ain't out this year, is it, Sheriff?"

"No, I've got nearly three more years to run before I hev to git out. Some of the boys down round the court-house is on the anxious seat, though. Beats all how when a man gits a soft seat in the court-house he just never wants to let go. Hope I'll never git to be that way."

"That's what I've always said," assented Houston promptly. "If they would get out and let some one else have a chance it would be a good deal better for the county. There would n't be so much extravagance. It's just terrible the way expenses pile up around that court-house and taxes getting higher and higher every year. It makes me plumb disgusted every time I go to Board meeting."

"You must have a hard time, Mr. Houston, but you air surely makin' a record to be proud of. I hear the people talkin' about it nearly every day, how you air savin' the keounty money an' standin' up fer the tax-payers. It would do you good to hear them talk — it would sure."

HIRAM BLAIR

"Well, I've tried to do my duty as I see it, and I'm glad if they appreciate it."

"There ain't no sort of doubt that they appreciate it, an' they know, too, that you air makin' a hard fight ag'in' the court-house ring. I don't b'leeve it's exaggeratin' a bit to say you air right now the most popular man in the keounty, do you, Walter?"

"I'm sure that's the way people feel about it in Morrison," chimed in Walter, taking his cue quickly. "They are glad to know that some one has the courage and ability to make a determined stand in opposition to the ring that has been ruling our county with an iron hand so many years."

"Yes, it is too bad," responded Mr. Houston. "The way things have been going. The court-house ring seems to be getting worse and worse. But some day the people will get tired and put a stop to it."

"They are tired now." Hiram had taken a fresh chew of tobacco and caught his breath. "The time is ripe to break down this court-house ring, an' all the people want is a leader they kin depend on. Only the other day

HOUSTON IS MADE A STATESMAN

there wuz a lot of fellers from all over the keounty in my office talkin' 'bout this very thing. They said now you had made a break it would be an easy matter to clean out the court-house an' they air lookin' to you to lead the fight. They all asked me to come an' talk it over with you, an' I promised the first time I wuz out this way I'd try to see you an' let you know how they felt. Walter an' me had some business over to Freetown this afternoon, an' ez it wuz n't much outen the way, we come by to talk to you an' let you know that the people of the keounty is expectin' a heap frum you this campaign."

"Well, I'd be mighty glad to do anything I can, but I can't see what is the best way to go about it. They 're in, and most of the fellows we elect to office fall in with the ring soon 's they get to New Boston."

"That 's right, too; the only way to break up the ring is to take away its leader. Ol' Dave Hinckley is the man. He is the boss, an' every 'tarnel one of them fellers in the court-house, 'cept me, does just what he tells them. Git him out, an' the thing is easy."

"I guess you 're right, Mr. Sheriff, but the

HIRAM BLAIR

people of the county long ago quit trying to beat him."

"That makes him all the easier to beat, Mr. Houston. He hez got so cock-sure that he don't do anything fer anybody nowadays an' they air gittin' sore on him all over the keounty. It hain't been 'cause he's so popylar with the people that he hez held on so long; it's 'cause men would just lay down like sheep an' let him run over them. I wuz n't doin' no polytics when he horn-swoggled you ouden your seat in the Legislature, but I've heerd many a time thet ef you'd stood up an' fit him, you'd carried the keounty an' he'd 'a' been left at home. An' them fellers in the office the other day wuz sayin' that you cud beat Ol' Dave plumb easy ef you'd just run ag'in' him. An' I've heerd other fellers a-sayin' the same thing."

"What, me! Why, Sheriff, who ever would think of me going to Congress? That's too high for me; I did think once I'd like to go back to the Legislature, but I've given that up now. The County Board is enough for an old man like me."

"Old, fiddlesticks! You're five years younger

HOUSTON IS MADE A STATESMAN

than Ol' Dave. You're the only man in Douglas Keounty that has ever ben to the Legislature 'cept Hinckley, an' ef he's to be put on the shelf you're the man for the place. There hez ben a heap of talk in the last week or two sence the Board meetin'. People air beginnin' to see how high-handed this court-house ring is, an' they air lookin' fer some one to lead them in a fight ag'in' it I s'pose I've talked to more'n twenty men in the last two weeks who say you air the only man in the keounty that kin beat Dave Hinckley, an' that you kin do it easy."

"I tell you what, boys, it would tickle me to see Dave beat. He ain't square and his record is bad. They used to tell some bad stories about him up in Indianapolis and I've never heard of his reforming. He wants to hog everything for himself and his friends. He won't let anybody else go to Indianapolis even now he's out, and nobody can get a place in the State-house unless he gets it from Hinckley. You know just last Legislature he come down here in this township and took Joe Riley's boy to Indianapolis and put him in a job at three dollars a day, and never come near me. And every time there's an

HIRAM BLAIR

election me and the boys hitch up and carry voters to the election and all Joe does is to stand there with a book in his hand and check 'em off. I'd like to see him beat, but I'm not smart enough to go to Congress. There's Mr. Crane now; he's a lawyer with a good education; let's run him."

"Oh, no, not me," interposed Walter. "I've only been in the State four years and am too young. I wouldn't be eligible. You are the man, Mr. Houston; you are greatly mistaken about not being smart enough. We need more men in Congress who know what the people want rather than what the lawyers want."

Hiram was again in the going. "That's all nonsense, Sam. Here they tell us it takes lawyers to make laws for us, and send a parcel of high-toned lawyers to Washington an' every time Congress adjourns it keeps the Supreme Court busy all summer declarin' their laws unconstitutional. There's too many lawyers there now an' not enough farmers. Ef they'd send more farmers an' business men to the Legislature an' Congress, we'd git laws that the people could understand. Kin you recollect anything Dave

HOUSTON IS MADE A STATESMAN

Hinckley hez done fer Douglas Keounty in all the years he 's been holdin' office?"

"No, I don't believe I can; but he is so well known, and makes speeches that get into all the papers, so the people of the county seem to think they have just got to send him back."

"Well, they don't hev to, and they won't if you 'll run ag'in' him. You kin do a great work for your keounty an' the State. You air honest, sensible, an' everybody has confidence in you. Ez soon ez you got to Washin'ton people would know that you air a man of strength an' power, or you could n't beat Dave Hinckley. So you would git right into the workin's of the thing an' you would be able to do a great sight of good, besides makin' a name for yourself all over the country. It is really your duty, Sam, to run, seein' that you air the only man in the keounty the people hev enough confidence in to elect. I 've felt myself that you might be a little skit-tish about runnin', an' put off sayin' anything to you about it ontill so many people hev been urg'in' me to see you, an' then Walter here says there 's a strong feelin' in Morrison that you ought to run, so we just made up our minds, being as

HIRAM BLAIR

we wuz in this neighborhood, to run over an' tell you how the land lays. Ef ever a man wuz called from on high to do a great sarvice for his people, you air now, Sam."

Mr. Houston was visibly touched. He was unable to conceal longer the pleasure the gatling gun fire of compliments was giving him. But he was still cautious. "Even if I really wanted to make the race, I don't believe I could afford it these times; everybody seems to want money in politics. Would n't it be too expensive?"

Hiram turned to Walter with an expression on his face that clearly said, "Our fish is biting, don't let him get off the hook;" but he only said in words, "Well, Walter is better at figgers than me; what do you say, Walter?"

"From what I've heard, the campaign ought to be made without much expense. You see, over with us at Morrison, all the Democrats are naturally against Hinckley because he has always turned down everybody from Morrison, and then there is so much feeling between the two cities. Our people would get out a big vote for you, Mr. Houston, without any expense, almost. There are, of course, quite a number of what are

HOUSTON IS MADE A STATESMAN

popularly called 'floaters' in every township, but as your strength would be with the intelligent, honest voters, you would not be obliged to spend much money on that element. At the same time, I'm not able to give you an exact idea, except generally that a few hundred dollars would be all it would be necessary to spend to carry this county; unless, of course, some entirely unforeseen circumstances should arise."

"Does n't it take more than Douglas County to nominate? It's a bigger district than the legislative district is n't it?" Mr. Houston was plainly beginning to take an interest.

"Douglas is the only large county in the congressional district," replied Walter. "The others are all small and have no candidates. The legislative district is all contained in this congressional district, and Douglas can control both, provided we do not have a candidate for the Senate or House. The other counties will vote for Douglas' candidate for Congress and our delegates will vote for their candidates for the legislative offices."

"Don't you think, men, that it would be easier to beat Hinckley the next time, after the people

HIRAM BLAIR

get a little better acquainted with him? He can say now he's not been in Congress long enough to do much for them. If we give him two more years and he don't do anything for the people then we ought to be able to beat him easily. By that time we can find some one to run against him that is more capable."

Hiram was about to reply without thinking, trusting to luck, but Walter stepped on his toe in the dark, and himself assumed the responsibility for the reply to this.

"That is where you are making a great mistake, Mr. Houston. We Hoosier Democrats have great hopes that our honored statesman, Tom Hendricks, will be nominated for President this year, and that he will be elected. Prospects for Democratic victory were never brighter. If we do win, Mr. Hinckley will by virtue of his office as Congressman, control the appointment of the postmasters and other federal office-holders in this district. By this means he will gain even greater power, and it will be impossible to defeat him. Then you and your friends will be left out in the cold when it comes to obtaining positions, as Hinckley will fill all the offices with

HOUSTON IS MADE A STATESMAN

his own henchmen. If he is to be defeated, now is the time, and you are the man."

"Well, boys, I 'll think it over, and we 'll talk to the good wife about it after supper. She is calling us now; let 's go in."

As they went around the house to wash their faces and hands in wash-pans on a bench standing against the wall, Hiram whispered to Walter: "Them unforeseen circumstances o' yourn is mighty sartin to arise."

CHAPTER VIII

THEY CONCILIATE MRS. HOUSTON

MR. HOUSTON'S three strapping sons and two comely daughters helped make up the supper party, but they left to their parents the burden of the conversation with the guests.

After saying grace Mr. Houston began heaping generous quantities of wholesome food upon the plates of the visitors, while Hiram at once started in to storm the castle of wifely opposition to Mr. Houston again entering politics.

"Mrs. Houston, I've always said that you air entitled to more credit than most any one for me bein' elected Sheriff. The fust time I wuz in this township I worked hard all mornin', an' did n't hardly find a soul fer me. I rounded up here fer dinner, tired, disheartened, an' mos' ready to quit; but that dinner you give me wuz enough to put heart in any man. I wuz just mighty hungry, an' you had everything a hungry man

THEY CONCILIATE MRS. HOUSTON

could ask for, an' plenty of it. I made up my mind right then that a man who wuz lucky enough to set down to a meal like that wuz lucky enough to win. I started out after dinner with my fightin' blood up, an' by night, with Mr. Houston's help, we had fixed it so I carried the township. I never got discouraged after that, but always felt as though I wuz sure to be Sheriff. I told Mr. Crane it would be worth a trip out here to set down to a meal of your cookin', an' I see he agrees with me, ef he ain't sayin' much."

Walter paused between mouthfuls. "I don't see, Hiram, how you can sit there and talk all the time with such a splendid meal in front of you. He is right, Mrs. Houston, when he gives you credit for saving the day for him. I can remember how enthusiastic he was the next time I saw him after he was here, in telling me how he enjoyed his dinner. That was all he would talk about — that and the great work Mr. Houston did in helping him get votes in this part of the county. I think he owes a great deal to both of you."

"I 'm sure it 's very kind of you gentlemen to speak so," mildly protested Mrs. Houston, "but

HIRAM BLAIR

we are only plain country folks, and never have anything fine like you city people do."

"You air mistaken there, Mrs. Houston," broke in Hiram, "there ain't nothin' pleases me better than to git out into the country an' eat such a meal ez this. Out here a feller kin eat all he wants an' there 's always plenty left. Yes, thank you, I'll take another helpin' of the chicken; it's fine — I've got purty considerable of an appetite, an' when I go into these hotels or eatin' houses where they charge twenty-five or fifty cents fer a meal they look at me ez if I wuz a wild beast or a cannibal every time I ask fer more."

"Did n't I hear something of an experience you had in Chicago at a restaurant some time ago?" Walter broke in.

"Now, you did n't hear about that, did you? I did n't intend to let thet ever git out, but here among my friends I don't mind tellin' it, provided you give me your solemn promise never to tell anybody else."

They all promised, and after Hiram had stored away an enormous quantity of supper he began his story.

CHAPTER IX

HIRAM EATS AN EXPENSIVE MEAL

IT was just a little while after I 'd got into office, an' I wuz mighty green in the ways of the big cities. I had to go to Chicago to git a prisoner. It took me a right smart of runnin' round gittin' papers an' such things, an' as thet wuz my fust attempt it made me powerful nervous, an' I did n't hev a chance to git anythin' to eat all day. The excitement had kep' me from havin' much appetite. Well, I finally got my man landed, an' had him put in jail fer safe keepin' ontill my train wuz to leave, and then I suddenly found out I wuz powerful hungry.

"The fust place I could git into wuz called Kinsley's, I b'leeve. I went in and they set me down to a table an' a waiter handed me a card with the names on it of the different things they had to eat. I begun orderin' an' eatin', an' orderin' an' eatin', an' thet waiter did n't hev a idle minit

HIRAM BLAIR

for more 'n a hour. Every onct in a while he 'd look at me kinder cur'ous like ez ef he thought I wuz likely to bust, but he never said a word. At last it was over, an' I tell you, folks, I felt at that minit at peace with all the world. Ef they 'd come an' told me my prisoner had broke jail, I don't b'leeve I 'd felt very bad right then. The waiter come up and stood behind me, so 's I could n't see his face, an' sez in a voice that sounded like his mouth wuz full of mush, 'Is that all, sir?' "

"I told him I had plenty, an' throwed a half dollar on the table. He grabbed it, an' put it under his apron. In a minit while I wuz sittin' there pickin' my teeth, back comes my waiter with a piece of paper on a tin tray, with hen scratches all over it, and lays it down in front of me. I thought mebbe it wuz a telygram, an' kinder thought I must be some punkins if the telygraph office knowed where I got my supper.

" 'What 's this?' I asked him.

" 'Your bill, sir,' he answered soft like.

" 'My bill! Did n't I pay you? I give you a half dollar just now.'

" 'Oh, no, sir; this is your bill. Here is what

HIRAM EATS AN EXPENSIVE MEAL

you've had. It amounts to four dollars and eighty-five cents.' "

"Gracious alive! for one meal?" ejaculated Mrs. Houston.

"Then I was hot," continued Hiram; "I did n't hev much money, an' to think I'd et enough at one meal to feed a able-bodied man for more'n a week made me feel clean swindled. I just jumped up, cracked my heels together an' swore I'd never pay it.

"Then a feller come around with a half yard of shirt front an' a coat thet looked like the cows had been chawin' off the front of it. He said he was the head waiter, and showed me the figgers on the card along with the names of the vittles, an' his voice sounded mushy, too, just like the waiter's with the apron. He said somethin' I did n't understand, but it was somethin' about a cart an' when I tol' 'em I did n't need no wagons, they both blowed their noses hard into their handkerchiefs. Finally I begin to see I'd been buncoed by my own foolishness in bein' too hungry to ask questions, but I wuz n't goin' to give up too easy, so I sez:

" 'Now look here, Mister Kinsley, I've made

HIRAM BLAIR

a deposit on this meal, with this white apervised feller, an' ef you will give me your street number, I 'll pay the rest in monthly payments.' I thought a meal that size ought to be sold on the instalment plan like they sell organs an' sewing machines. But he would n't hear to it, an' threatened to call in a policeman. I hed just gumption enough not to tell him I wuz Sheriff of Douglas Keounty, Indiany. I seen I wuz up ag'in' it, an' give in ez gracefully ez I could. I sez this time:

"'Well, I 've give this feller fifty cents ez a retainer an' I s'pose I hev to fork up the balance.' I give him four dollars an' thirty-five cents more an' grabbed my hat an' overcoat. Goin' out I sneaked a look over my shoulder an' the feller in the split-tail coat was laffin' fit to kill, but the white apervised feller looked ez mad ez ef he'd just heerd his mother-in-law wuz comin' fer a month's visit."

Mrs. Houston said, quite innocently, "I've often heard of people being held up and robbed in these large cities, but I did n't suppose they would treat a Sheriff that way."

HIRAM EATS AN EXPENSIVE MEAL

"They won't any more," Hiram responded dryly.

"You see, Mrs. Houston," Walter suggested after he had finished laughing at Hiram's story, "Mr. Blair is justified in thinking a great deal of the dinner he got here, because he has it set in his memory right alongside of this one that cost him so much money and was n't really as good as the meal he got here. I had looked forward to my first visit here with much pleasure, for Mr. Blair has so often told me what a fine time he had here and how kindly you treated him. I find now that, notwithstanding he is naturally very enthusiastic, he has not given you credit enough. I certainly can say I've never enjoyed a meal better than this, though I've never tried any of Mr. Blair's four dollar and eighty-five cent ones."

CHAPTER X

SAM HOUSTON BECOMES A CANDIDATE

“**W**HAT do you think, Mother, these boys have asked me to run for Congress against Senator Hinckley!” When the family was comfortably settled in the large sitting-room after supper Sam Houston exploded this bomb, and carefully noted its effect on his wife and children.

“I think candidates for office must be terrible scarce nowadays, Sam! But of course you’ve told them you would n’t.”

“Oh, well, I did n’t say finally that I just would n’t; but told them to get somebody else, and they insisted on talking to you about it, anyway.”

“I don’t see as it will do any good to talk to me about it. I don’t like politics and am always sorry when election time comes around. Goodness knows, I did n’t want you to go to Indianapolis, and was glad when they shut you out

HOUSTON BECOMES A CANDIDATE

from going back. The less my men have to do with politics the better I like it. A man as old as you, Sam, ought to be satisfied to stay at home with his family instead of cavorting over the country running for office. There's plenty of men wanting to run. You'd best keep out of it, if you want to know what I think."

"Why, Mrs. Houston," Walter broke in, spurred by Hiram's vigorous but surreptitious nudging, "you mustn't allow your prejudice against politics to stand in the way of your husband's doing his duty to the county and to our good old Hoosier State. You and Mr. Houston have lived here on the farm, worked hard and accumulated plenty of property for yourselves and your children. You have raised a family you ought to be proud of, and I have no doubt you are. You can afford to open a way for your sons and daughters to get out into the world without leaving the farm. They will acquire culture and acquaintance which will be invaluable to them. More than that, they will see enough of the world to be satisfied to stay here on the farm to comfort your declining years, rather than

HIRAM BLAIR

scatter to the four winds as so many farmer boys and girls do.”

“Oh, I want my children to have an easier time of it than we did, but I don’t see how their pa’s going to Congress is going to help. I’m a home body, and have tried to raise my children so they have everything pleasant here at home. I’m sure they don’t want to go to Washington. They’re used to the farm and can have a better time here than they could where they don’t know anybody. It must be so lonesome in those big cities with people passing you on the street all the time you never saw before.”

Hiram startled Walter at this juncture by going over to Mrs. Houston’s side of the argument in the most inexplicable manner.

“That’s just what I said to Mr. Crane comin’ over from Freetown, Mrs. Houston; that you would n’t want to break up your mighty comfortable home here to let Sam go to Congress. My experience is they’s two kinds of wimmen — one kind wants their husbands to git inter politics, so’s they kin cut a shine in sassiety, an’ the other kind wants to keep their husbands at home. I’m fer the woman as wants to keep her husband

HOUSTON BECOMES A CANDIDATE

at home, an' b'leeve she makes the best wife. I don't blame you fer feelin' the way you do."

Walter was astounded at Hiram deserting him in this cold-blooded fashion. He could not see the least excuse for it, but he took up the argument with Mrs. Houston without noticing Hiram's interruption.

"I can see where you are right from your standpoint, Mrs. Houston, but there is another side to the question. Times have changed since you were young. The city and the country are getting closer and closer together every year. Railroads, telegraph and telephones are bringing the city and country almost into one community. Your children cannot be satisfied with the advantages you had when you were children, for they will see your neighbors' children getting the benefits of the improved conditions. They will not consent to be left behind and you will not want them to be less favored than your neighbors' children. Just think what an advantage it will be to them if their father is Congressman Houston, one of the most highly honored men in the State. Getting a good start in the world is always a great help to young people. It is n't

HIRAM BLAIR

giving boys and girls good education and business opportunity that hurts, but it is rearing them in idleness without purpose in life that ruins so many of the children of our wealthy people. Idleness is the foundation of crime. Your children hardly know the meaning of the word idleness, and their characters are built upon a foundation as solid as a rock. I might almost say your husband owes it as a duty to his children and to succeeding generations to accept this chance to make a name for himself, which will be honored for many years. It is n't often such a good chance is presented to one, and of course it will never come again to Mr. Houston."

While Hiram was talking, Mrs. Houston turned gratefully to him, and now appealed to him as a supporter, little realizing how frail a reed she was leaning on.

"I'm so glad you're on my side, Mr. Blair. I expect Mrs. Blair feels just like I do. Of course it is n't so bad for her because she is right with you in New Boston, but I don't believe I ever could live in Washington, and Sam would n't stay there without me, I know."

Walter did n't let Hiram interrupt him this

HOUSTON BECOMES A CANDIDATE

time. "As to that, it is n't necessary for you to be there all the time. You and the children could go and come about as you liked. The railroads are not backward in giving passes to Congressmen, so Mr. Houston and all of you could travel to and from Washington about as you pleased. Your daughters would like it there, I know. I am told the Hinckley girls are wild to go back to the capital and get into society there. They spend the winter in Washington and all the summer in New Boston telling their girl friends what a glorious time they 've had."

"Which do you think they enjoy the most?" timidly ventured Sarah Houston, the first time she had spoken after greeting the visitors when they came into the house.

Hiram and Walter could hardly restrain themselves from breaking into uproarious laughter, but by a supreme effort Walter kept his face straight and answered:

"Really, Miss Houston from what the other girls tell me of the enthusiasm they show, it is hard to say which they get the most pleasure from." Taking up the thread of his argument:

"You could be in Washington a part of the

HIRAM BLAIR

time, Mrs. Houston, and the girls, one or both of them part of the time. In that way you could nicely take care of Mr. Houston there and the farm here."

"But, Mr. Crane, politics is so corrupt. I've heard so many people say an honest man has no business in politics. Mr. Houston and me are plain country folks, but we've always tried to live honest Christian lives. I'm not afraid of Mr. Houston, but the Bible says, 'Lead me not into temptation.'"

"Mrs. Houston, politics is the business of managing this government. The law that says what you and I shall do and what we shall not do is made by politics. The right you have to occupy this farm without molestation is given you by politics. In fact, every privilege you have in this great nation of ours is given you by politics. The church regulates your spiritual affairs and affords you assurance of eternal happiness in the next world. Politics controls your affairs in this life, and aside from the church there is no more important factor in human affairs than politics. Even the right to educate your children is given you by politics.

HOUSTON BECOMES A CANDIDATE

"It is not true, Mrs. Houston, that politics itself is corrupt. There are corrupt men in politics, I grant, but there are good men, too. The trouble is, too few good men will engage in politics. Why? They say it is because they are too good to mix in politics, but that is not it. They are too selfish to sacrifice their own interests and comfort for the good of the State. If Mr. Houston and men like him made up Congress, would it be corrupt? You know it would n't. If your church should by any mischance get wicked men in control of it, and they should do evil things, would n't you consider it to be Mr. Houston's duty and yours to get together the good people of the church and take away the control from the wicked ones? It is true the Bible says, 'Lead me not into temptation,' but it is also true that it teaches Christians to spread the gospel of truth and righteousness throughout the world, to combat wickedness everywhere. There is no place in the Bible where Christians are taught to allow sin to flourish undisturbed in order that Christians shall not be tempted. Even our blessed Saviour went with Satan to the top of the mountain and allowed temptation to be pressed

HIRAM BLAIR

upon Him that the world might be taught to resist temptation.

"There are men in Congress who are either weak or wicked and they are allowing things to be done which are injurious to the welfare of the country. It is for this reason we want Mr. Houston to become a candidate, and to go there to help reform these things. His State is calling him to his duty, Mrs. Houston, and I hope you will not permit the thought of your own comfort to influence you to persuade him that he ought to refuse."

"I know I can't argue against a lawyer," protested Mrs. Houston, "but I know I don't want Sam to go to Washington, and I don't want the children to go. Our minister says it is a terribly wicked place, and that men there drink awful."

"There is more or less wickedness everywhere, Mrs. Houston, but it is wicked people who are responsible for it, not the good. You and Mr. Houston and your family can be just as good there as here. There are thousands of good Christian people in Washington, and I know none of you can be hurt by a few years there. That is another reason we are anxious to have

HOUSTON BECOMES A CANDIDATE

Senator Hinckley defeated. He has been in public life so long and being naturally disposed to take life easily, he has become mixed up in the fast life of the capital. I'm told it has begun to tell on him and he is quite seriously addicted to drink. His friends say he does n't often go wrong in New Boston, but it is different in Washington. He ought not to be sent back to be tempted, for he has already yielded to temptation. We have canvassed the situation thoroughly before making up our minds Mr. Houston is the only man who can defeat him."

"Why, mercy!" exclaimed Mrs. Houston, "the people surely would n't send a man to make laws for us if they knew he drinks like that."

Walter caught a faint suspicion of a snicker from Hiram's direction, but the innocent simplicity of Mrs. Houston struck him as more pathetic than humorous.

"The people are slow to believe these things, Mrs. Houston, especially when they are charged against a candidate by his enemies in a political campaign. If the State is to get the benefit of your husband's rugged honesty, you will have to make this sacrifice. I know it is hard for you

HIRAM BLAIR

to think of giving up the comforts of this happy home you have here, but we must all bear our fair share of the responsibility of life."

When Walter finished speaking there was silence for full sixty seconds, stretched out into minutes in the minds of all, as they sat there thinking of what the next moment might bring forth and its probable effect on their future. The silence was at length broken by Hiram.

"Mrs. Houston, ez I said a while ago, I sez to Walter comin' out, sez I, 'Walt, Mrs. Houston hez lived there on the farm with Sam year after year, happy and contented, an' she'll never be willin' to let Sam go to Washington.' That's what I tol' the other fellers who come to get me to ask Sam to run. I knowed he oughter run, but I hated to pester you about it. I know jus' how you feel, 'cause my woman is the same way, an' it's right, too; I would n't give shucks for a woman as did n't feel that-a-way. But ez I set here an' listened to Walt I cud see your duty jus' ez plain ez if it was in Holy Writ. I had n't ever had it explained to me as Walt hez done it, and I cud n't see but one side; I reckon we'll hev ter give up, an' let Sam run."

HOUSTON BECOMES A CANDIDATE

Mrs. Houston was dismayed. She had lost her only support at the critical period. Hiram had cunningly contrived to aid Walter in a manner which Walter would have condemned and forbidden if he had been consulted beforehand. By appearing to side with Mrs. Houston he had led her to depend on him for support when the time came for decision, and at that important moment he had deserted her in a conscienceless manner. Walter was angry with him but could not help giving him credit for having executed a very skilful manoeuvre. Seeing herself without help, Mrs. Houston capitulated.

"Well, Sam hardly ever asks my advice about anything until after he's made up his mind what he's going to do. If he is actually going into politics, I do hope he will do some good, and I'll help him all I can with my prayers; but if you do, Sam, don't you dare spend any money on them miserable 'floaters' I've heard so much about."

Sam Houston had not spoken a word since the discussion started, but he seemed to think his wife's remark concerning him required defence.

"Speaking of taking my wife's advice," he said

HIRAM BLAIR

half in joke, but fully half in earnest, "I've always believed that in a man's business and political doings a wife's advice is like a brake on a wagon. When a fellow's going down hill he wants to put on the brakes hard, but when he starts up hill again, he wants to let 'em off."

Sam Houston was a full-fledged candidate for Congress against David Hinckley, and not quite forty-eight hours had elapsed since Florence Bassett had made her demand on Walter.

He wanted to take Hiram out in the yard and hug him.

CHAPTER XI

WALTER'S CONSCIENCE GETS INTO ACTION

“**W**ALT, you write up the announcement an’ see how it suits Sam.” Hiram lost no time in clinching the arrangement now it had been made. “Then we will take it to the *Banner* in the mornin’. There ain’t no time to be lost. Soon’s the announcement is out you come to town, Sam, an’ we will talk over the plans. Don’t put it off longer than Saturday.”

The announcement was prepared in Walter’s best style, after he had asked a few questions concerning Mr. Houston’s life. When he read it aloud, the Houston family thought the seat in Congress was already in their father’s grasp. Then Hiram and Walter, despite the protests of the Houstons, insisted on driving back to New Boston in the night. It was not until Hiram convinced Mr. Houston it would not be a good thing for Hinckley’s friends to find out just who

HIRAM BLAIR

it was that had conveyed to him the call of the people, and therefore they must return to New Boston before morning, that he gave a reluctant consent to their leaving that night.

They were fully a mile on the road homeward before either Hiram or Walter spoke a word. Hiram would occasionally break into a low chuckle, but Walter was in a serious mood, though supremely happy. They had turned out on to the main road and the horses were trotting easily in the moonlight, when Hiram gave vent to a laugh.

"Walt, ef you had n't ben a lawyer you 'd a ben a confidence man."

"Let 's not try to be funny, Hi; this is serious business."

"I can't help it, Walt; I 've got to git it out of me an' I 'd better do it before we git back to town. When you wuz talkin' to the ol' lady, I kept wantin' to pat you on the back an' say, 'Walt, go up head.' You sure air a wonder, boy, when you tackle the wimmen. I wuz watching the ol' lady an' the gals while you wuz talkin', and when you pulled open the throttle and got on a full head of steam, I cud see they knowed

WALTER'S CONSCIENCE

they'd hev to git outen the way or be run over."

"That was a low-down trick you played on Mrs. Houston and me. I had half a mind to throw up the whole thing when you broke in there."

"Yes, but you had a better notion. You sometimes remind me of the preacher I went to see onct when I wuz running fer Sheriff. After we'd agreed he wuz to git ten dollars fer workin' fer me an' I give him the money, an' wuz startin' to go, he stopped me an' sed, 'Mr. Blair, ef you don't mind, I'd like to hev you put your name down on this subscription list fer the church fer that ten dollars, so's there won't be anything improper about it.' Ef I had n't ben a candidate, I'd asked him ef he expected to take that book along with him an' put it up ag'in' the Judgment Record, but I did n't."

"No, of course you did n't, for you are as great a hypocrite as he. Really, Hi, I'm about half sorry I got you into this. If it was to do over again, I think I'd flatly refuse. You remember what Mrs. Houston said to her husband about praying that he would do right, and how earnest

HIRAM BLAIR

she was in insisting that he should not spend any money on the floating vote. That made me sick at heart, Hi."

"Don't let that work on your feelings, Walt. Mrs. Houston will always want Sam to do what's right, fer she is a good, honest soul, without the least spark of meanness in her system. But politics is a cur'ous thing an' works wonders on people. Before this campaign is over Mrs. Houston, God bless her, will be ready to sell the last chicken on the farm to buy 'floaters' for Sam's election, an' she will be peacefully cert'in it is bein' done fer righteousness' sake."

CHAPTER XII

JOE SIMPSON IS ENLISTED IN THE CAUSE

BEFORE Hiram left the house the next morning he sent over to the court-house for his deputy, who arrived while he was eating breakfast. He took the deputy into the sitting-room away from the other members of the family, without waiting to finish his meal.

"Joe, take this here letter over to the *Banner* office an' tell 'em you wuz out to Sam Houston's yestiddy an' he give you this to bring to town. Tell 'em it is his announcement fer Congress ag'in' Senytor Hinckley, an' that he tol' you, so many of his friends had been after him to run, he jus' could n't refuse 'em; an' tell the editor there's a ten dollar bill in the letter, an' be sure you wait an' see him open it, so's there can't be any misunderstandin' 'bout the money. Tell him to send Sam a receipt, too, fer Sam 'll be mighty partickylar 'bout keepin' track of what he spends for a while."

HIRAM BLAIR

"You seem to be golderned skairt yourself 'bout thet dodgasted ten dollar bill, Hiram." Joe was indignant. "You don't think I 'm goin' to start in robbin' the mails, do you?"

"Joe, you 'd never do to work in a powder mill — you fire up without any excuse at all. But I 'll tell you 'bout the experence I had onct with puttin' money in a letter thet makes me jus' a bit squeemish 'bout it, an' I s'pose mebbe I wuz a leetle too partickylar in givin' you direkshuns. It wuz when I wuz married; you know I got my wife down in Southwest Missouri. She wuz a school teacher an' hed slicked up a bit, but her people were kinder ol' fashioned. She is awful religious, my wife is, an' she made up her mind she would n't feel like she wuz married onless the same preacher thet baptized her tied the knot. So we hed to send fer him. I held out ag'in' him ontill the last day, but it was no go. Suse was sot on this preacher. Sed it wuz too important a step to take onless she could hev her old preacher with her, so 's she could feel like she was startin' out with his blessin'. So I give in, an' he come. He wuz from the backwoods, greener than I wuz, an' the more I saw him the more I

JOE SIMPSON IS ENLISTED

wondered how ez smart a woman ez my wife cud hev such poor taste in preachers."

"Mebbe that splains how you happened to git 'er," broke in Joe.

"Who's tellin' this story, Joe? You or me? You keep still until I finish. Some of my city friends from Morrison went along with me, an' I wuz tryin' to put on some style. This here backwoods preacher did n't git to the house until a few minits before the time for the show to begin an' we did n't hev time to go through the paces before, ez they always do at these high-toned weddings. I took the preacher out and begged him to cut it short, an' handed him the license in a big envelope.

"Before I give him the license I laid the last two five dollar bills I hed on earth between the folds of the paper, so 's he would find 'em when he looked at the license. We got ready an' marched in, all the people starin' hard an' me feelin' mos' as shaky ez if I wuz marchin' to the gallus. When we got in front of the preacher an' come to a full stop, thet preacher dived into his pocket an' pulled out the envelope. He grabbed the license awkwardlike — he wuz

HIRAM BLAIR

rattled, too,—and opened it. Them two five dollar bills floated out, an' the wind blowin' through the open winders sent 'em in different direckshuns. They wuz a little snicker went round the room, but it did n't stop that preacher. He let go all holts and started to capture them fivers. One blowed under a table, an' he dropped on all fours an' made a grab fer it. The other flew to the oppersite side of the room, an' it was ketched by a little boy who run up to him an' shouted out loud, 'Mister, here's your money.' An' all this time Suse an' me wuz standin' there holdin' hands an' lookin' foolish an' feelin' a derved sight foolisher. The people managed by the skin of their teeth to keep frum bustin' out laffin', but you kin reckon that the solemnncholy of thet occasion was jus' about frazzled. It wuz hard enough fer me anyhow, ez we Hoosiers ain't like them Mormons thet marry so offen they git inter practice. Sence that time, whenever I see a paper bill in a letter it gives me the fidgets."

Joe laughed heartily at Hiram's story, and was mollified. "Is there anythin' else you want me to do?" he asked.

JOE SIMPSON IS ENLISTED

"Yes; I 'm not near through with you yit. Tell the editor I wuz over to Langdon yestiddy an' you hain't saw me sence I come back. If he asks you who wrote the announcement, tell him you don't know as it was wrote before you got there. That 'll be the truth, an' a man ought always tell the truth when he kin, even to a editor. It 'll be wastin' it to tell it to this *Banner* man, 'cause he kain't use it in his bizness, but it won't be no great waste. Arter you air through with the *Banner* man, go out on the streets, an' see ef he tells 'bout the announcement. I calkilate he 'll rush right out an' send a telygram to Senytor Hinkley in Washin'ton, an' we 'll hev the ol' man on our backs in 'bout three days, but we kain't help thet. See what the people air sayin' 'bout it, an' let me know, soon 's you hear anythin'."

As Joe was about to leave, Hiram called him back.

"An' say, Joe, I reckon you 'd better be fer Ol' Dave, leastways fer a little while, so 's you kin kinder keep posted on what they air doin'. We air goin' to beat the Senytor this time, Joe, an' I want you to help all you kin. You need n't

HIRAM BLAIR

laff, Joe, you air one of them ol' fogies who b'leeve 'cause a thing hain't never ben done it kain't never be done. You do your part, an' you 'll git to see one of the biggest politycal funerals ever held in Douglas Keounty. So long ez you kin keep track of what Dave is doin', you say you 're fer him. Some day when there 's a crowd in the offis, we 'll quarrel 'bout it, an' I 'll threaten to discharge you."

Joe Simpson did not question either the purposes or the methods of his chief. He understood that Hiram expected implicit obedience to his orders, especially those concerning politics; and he liked the place of deputy too well to take any chance of losing it by questioning Hiram Blair's orders. To his mind, the work he had been told to do was a necessary means to an end Hiram wished to accomplish, and that swept aside all considerations of right and wrong in his mind. He was doing what Hiram told him to do, and he would do it faithfully at whatever cost. As he left the office he soliloquized:

"Hiram is purty long headed, but I 'll place my money he 's bit off more 'n he kin chaw this time."

CHAPTER XIII

FLORENCE GETS HER FIRST LESSON IN POLITICS

IT was a glorious Sunday afternoon in late May. Flowers were in bloom everywhere, fruit trees in blossom and the fields of grain gave promise of bountiful harvest. The sun shone brightly and the air was balmy, with just a tinge of sharpness. It was just such a day as lovers delight in. Walter Crane and Florence Bassett were driving over the country roads near New Boston. Walter's heart was full of love and thanksgiving. Bright as the sunshine was the light of love that shone in his eyes, and more buoyant with hope than the fields of grain ripening for the harvest were the thoughts of the future surging through his brain.

None the less joyous were Florence's reflections as she looked out upon the scene of beauty and of promise that spread itself before her enraptured vision. To her it was a picture of life to come. Her lover was by her side and naught

HIRAM BLAIR

but joy was in her world; love reigned over all, seated on the throne of confidence, and they were its faithful subjects.

But one short week had passed since Florence had commanded her lover to strike down the puissant Congressman, yet the accomplishment of this which they imagined was their greatest desire, seemed to be within easy reach. Walter and Hiram Blair had taken up all the forenoon forming plans for the campaign now to begin in dead earnest. Hiram, with the enthusiasm characterizing every good general, had inspired Walter with the belief that victory was only a question of effort.

"You are to have your wish," were Walter's first words after he and Florence had greeted one another affectionately on this Sunday afternoon. Florence, accepting the word of her lover as law, had given herself up to unquestioning happiness, joyously confident that aught she might desire could be had by asking her sweetheart for it.

Who is there that would forego the joy of having lived a part of one's life in the glamour and the golden sunshine of youthful prophecy, as Florence Bassett and Walter Crane were doing

HER FIRST LESSON IN POLITICS

this Sunday afternoon, blissfully unconscious of the troubles the future had in store for them?

Yet there was a tinge of bitter mixed with the sweet in Florence's thoughts now that she looked forward to the campaign as a reality. She had waited with feverish anxiety for the announcement of Mr. Houston's candidacy to be made in New Boston and watched with interest its reception. As her father was a well-known Republican she was not supposed to take a great interest in Democratic politics, but was enabled through her intimacy with the young people of New Boston to gain quick and accurate information as to the way the news was received that Congressman Hinckley was to have opposition. She was greatly shocked and disappointed by what she learned when she took her first lesson in practical politics. All those young people in her social set whom she had so freely pledged to Walter as ready to oppose Hinckley she found now to be enthusiastic in his support. She remembered with a little quiver of self-disparagement that Walter had predicted this condition and realized that now she must confess he was right and she was wrong. Florence was

HIRAM BLAIR

brave enough to acknowledge her error, but was anxious to have it over with.

"Walter, I am thoroughly happy over your splendid success in getting the campaign started so nicely, but it is disgusting to me to see the way these New Boston people have turned clear around, and are now standing for Congressman Hinckley, when only a few days ago they were denouncing him as corrupt and morally unfit to represent this district in Congress."

Walter laughed rather gleefully. "Don't let that worry you, my dear. We have not expected any help in New Boston and are not disappointed."

"But they expressed themselves so emphatically and I had such confidence in them that I assured you they would help, and now every one of them is abusing poor Mr. Houston as if he was trying to break into their houses and steal something."

"I suppose the announcement occasioned some excitement," observed Walter. "Do they suspect me of responsibility for it?"

"They have n't intimated to me that they do in words, but after the *Banner* came out with Mr.

HER FIRST LESSON IN POLITICS

Houston's announcement in it, Ralph Thompson came rushing into the store where several of us were talking, and cried out, 'Listen to this, girls; another statesman has just been discovered.' Then he handed me the paper with a slight grimace, and pointing to the Houston article, asked me to read it for the edification of the crowd."

"I would have enjoyed seeing your face just then."

"I don't think you would. I put on my most austere manner and told him that being a Republican I declined to mix in Democratic quarrels. Mr. Thompson took the paper and read the article, making occasional sarcastic comments, and once said in a whisper, 'This reads as if it had been written by a Philadelphia lawyer.' They all laughed at that sally, and by that time I was burning up. I can see they are going to make my life miserable all through this campaign, and if you love me you must get it over with and Mr. Hinckley defeated just as soon as you can."

CHAPTER XIV

HIRAM AND WALTER GO PROSELYTING

YOU 'LL haf ter stay in New Bosting to-morrow, Walt. They's got ter be somethin' done, and mighty powerful quick, too."

Hiram was sitting up waiting for Walter in the dining-room and greeted him with this remark after Walter had complied with his sten-torian command to "come right in," in response to Walter's knock. Hiram was in his shirt sleeves, his feet on the table, smoking vigorously at his cob pipe. This was his favorite attitude when he wished to think out hard problems.

"Stay here to-morrow! Now what's up?"

"Well, son, I am fer one thing, when I oughter ben in bed two hours ago. Hain't ol' man Bassett any rules 'bout when he closes up the house? When I went courtin', ef I stayed arter ten, the ol' man 'd come to the door an' sing

HIRAM AND WALTER

out, 'Suse, you got ter git up at four in the mornin'! I don't know what would 'a' happened ef I had n't took the hint, 'cause I always took it."

Walter ignored the question. "What is the necessity for me to remain over to-morrow? I have some pressing engagements at home to-morrow."

"See here, son"—Hiram pretended to be indignant—"I've let you 'tend to pressin' engagements all afternoon an' up to midnight, an' me here wearin' out my brain figgerin' on schemes to make our fixin' go; now you've got ter give up your pressin' engagements fer to-morrow, or I'll throw up the hull thing an' go out an' tell your gal 'bout your pressin' engagements bustin' the proceeding."

"Oh, I'll stay if it is really important. I can telegraph my folks to wait till Tuesday; what is the trouble?"

"'Tain't no trouble; it's too late to splain it now, an' I'm ag'in' mixin' politics an' love-makin'. But we're inter this fixin' now an' air goin' to see it through. You go right to bed, sleep jist ez sound ez you kin, an' be ready fer

HIRAM BLAIR

some fine work in the mornin'. I've thought it out, an' we'll talk it over at breakfast."

This was all the information Hiram would give Walter, and with it he had to be content. As he was leaving the room, however, Hiram stopped him with —

"Gosh, Walt, I wuz 'bout to forgit. Ol' Hinckley got home this afternoon from Washin'ton."

"He did? How do you know?"

"I seed him; big crowd met him at the deepo; would 'a' had the band 'cept it wuz Sunday. He wuz n't overly spoony with me, but did n't let on he'd heerd anything 'bout Sam. One of the fellers sidled up 'longside of me, ez I wuz askin' him 'bout the weather in Washin'ton, and sez, 'Senytor, you had n't heerd, had ye, that Sam Houston's thinkin' of runnin' ag'in' yer?' The ol' feller turned like he wuz s'prised an' sez, 'No, is thet so? My friend Sam? That's a good joke.' An' he sez to me thet he had some bizness in Cincinnatty an' he'd jist run over to see his fam'ly while he was so clost."

"What did you say to that, Hi?"

"Me? I jest turned on my heel an'

HIRAM AND WALTER

skeedaddled. I never cud bear to stan' an' listen to a feller't cud beat me lyin'. Good-night, Walt."

When Walter awoke the next morning Hiram was sitting on the side of the bed, half dressed.

"Dreamin' 'bout love in a cottage, wuz you, Walt? It's powerful nice to dream about an' to see off in the distance, but when you git inter the bizness, it's diff runt. Ef I had my way, a man 'd haf ter court a gal fifteen or twenty year before he could marry her. Then everybody 'd be happy that long, anyway. One of the kids broke out las' night with the measles and Mrs. Blair is takin' care of him. We won't see her, an' I don't know what we'll git to eat."

"Measles! Thank fortune, I've had them. It would n't do to start in this campaign spreading measles all over the county."

"No, an' I've got ter keep away from the kids an' my wife, until it's over, too. I kinder b'lieve, Walt, some of these New Bosting friends of Ol' Dave is at the bottom of this an' got some children with the measles to play with my young uns."

Walter was disposed to laugh at this, but

HIRAM BLAIR

taking a surreptitious look at Hiram's face he saw that he was thoroughly in earnest, and desisted.

Family troubles could not keep Hiram's mind from politics long. "Here 's what I 've laid out to do to-day, Walt. You kain't understand how hard it is to make any headway ag'in' Ol' Dave so long 's I 'm all alone here in New Bosting fightin' him. We just got ter git some one to help here. It ain't thet I expect to git any votes ag'in' him to amount to much, right here in the keounty-seat, but it 's fer the moral effect."

"Moral effect?" interposed Walter. "When did you discover that morality had anything to do with politics?"

"Don't be foolish, sonny. You know what I mean. Every time a feller comes in frum the country he asks, 'How 's politics?' And everybody sez Dave is sweepin' the keounty. Ef a feller from some township comes in an' sez Sam Houston's got some votes in his neck of the woods, they look s'prised an' say, 'Is that so? It's the fust place I 've heerd of.' That's the way it goes here all the time. Ef I kin git a strong man like George Jenkins lined up with

HIRAM AND WALTER

us, it 'll take a lot of wind out er their sails, an' that 's what we 've got ter do."

"George Jenkins! Why, Hi, he and Senator Hinckley have been fast friends for years. Then he is the leading lawyer in New Boston aside from Hinckley, and they are closely associated in professional and social affairs."

"You 've got it all, Walt; them 's the reasons why we air goin' after him. You don't s'pose I 'd keep you away from them pressin' engagements at Morrison all day an' hev you risk ketchin' the measles jest to fish for perch, do you? No, my boy, we 're goin' to land a game fish to-day. I 've got it all thought out; Jenkins hez a idee he is not only the smartest man in Douglas Keounty, but the honestest one, too. He hez the notion in his head that the people air makin' a great mistake in sendin' Dave Hinckley to Congriss when they oughter be sendin' him —"

"Then why did n't we run him instead of Sam Houston? I don't see how we are to get him to be for Houston."

"Walt, you air simple an' no mistake; you know so much about wimmen an' books they ain't no place in your head fer knowin' men.

HIRAM BLAIR

George Jenkins could n't beat one side of Ol' Dave. He 's ben wantin' to fight the ol' feller fer twenty year, an' hain't never ben able to git his nerve up. What he wants is fer some other feller to go after Ol' Dave an' take the fight out er him, an' then he 'll tackle him. He ain't fer Sam now, but he 's goin' to be or we 'll lose a day's work. What we must do is to see him an' make him think he 's the real thing. I 'm going to take you along an' ask his advice 'bout some law question that I 've got up, then we 'll foller it up with the heavy cannonading. You watch me, an' when I git run down, you sail in; it 'll be dead easy, fer he soaks up flattery like a sponge."

CHAPTER XV

GEORGE JENKINS GETS ON THE FENCE

GEORGE JENKINS' law office was in a one-story frame building across the street from the court-house yard. It was political headquarters in New Boston when Congress was in session and Hinckley was away, but on this morning Mr. Jenkins had plenty of time to himself.

Hiram and Walter found him alone. He was gazing somewhat enviously out the window and across the court-house square at the crowds that were going in and out of Hinckley's office. Hiram at once plunged into his subject after they had retired to the back office for a private talk.

"Mr. Jenkins, I 'm up a stump on a law question which hez come up in my office, an' I come over to ask your opinion. I saw Senytor Hinckley this mornin', an' asked him, but Walt Crane here an' the Senytor don't agree an' I 'm all

HIRAM BLAIR

flustered up, so I thought ef you had time I 'd come over an' git a opinion I cud depend on. After we 'd talked it over Mr. Crane sez I 'd better put the question to you, ez he 'd ruther risk your judgment than any lawyer in the keounty."

Mr. Jenkins was evidently pleased. "You give me entirely too much credit, gentlemen, but if I can help you, I 'll be glad to do so."

Hiram then went into detail describing the knotty legal problem he had thought out, and discussed at length with Walter before presenting it to Mr. Jenkins. This astute gentleman consumed some time consulting law books, while his visitors sat waiting patiently, and after considerable study gave an elaborate and careful opinion.

"That 's it — that 's just what I wanted," exclaimed Hiram enthusiastically, when Jenkins had finished. "Now I know just what to do. Walter tol' me purty much the same ez you, only he did n't go inter it so deep, an' he wuz n't quite sure he wuz right. Now, do you know, Mr. Jenkins, Senytor Hinckley took exactly the other end of the argyment an' if I 'd took his advice, he 'd a steered me dead wrong. I don't see

ON THE FENCE

why people think he is such a big lawyer. I'd rather have a off-hand guess from you than a opinion from him after he'd studied on it a week."

"Senator Hinckley has been quite successful in his practice, and is generally credited with being a very able lawyer," deprecatingly replied Jenkins.

"Oh, well, I understan' all that, but he is the most overrated man in Douglas Keounty an' you air the most underrated, that's a fact. He's got to be the leader of the Democratic party in this keounty an' dictates everythin'. Thet gives him a holt on the people an' they think he's a second Moses. He won't give any other feller a show. Did he ever give you a show, Mr. Jenkins? Not by a long shot. He's afeerd to. Ef you had a even start with him, you'd pass him before the race wuz half over. He's jest spread out so's he takes up all the track an' nobody kin pass him 'cause they can't git by him; it's the same thing in politics as in law. He gits up an' hollers an' everybody thinks they're hearin' the gospel; an' let me tell you, Mr. Jenkins, he's goin' to hang on jest ez long ez you people who

HIRAM BLAIR

air his betters let him. Fer my part, I come from Morrison, an' I don't haf ter knuckle to him, an' I ain't goin' to do it."

"I think there is a good deal in what you say, Mr. Blair," cautiously responded Jenkins, "but the people of New Boston feel that Hinckley has in a way put the town on the map, and they are not likely to go against him."

"Thet's just it," Hiram persisted. "The ol' Senytor makes 'em think no one else could do ez much fer the people ez he does. That's what he banks on. He kin make a good speech but you kin make a better one when it comes down to solid hoss sense, an' ez fer ability he ain't in your class, an' yit he sez he kin lead you aroun' any-way he wants to. Las' time he wuz in New Bosting I overheard him tellin' a feller, 'Oh, Jenkins he'll be all right, he's a little jealous, but all I've got ter do is call him, an' he'll come. He's afeerd to go ag'in' me.' That's the way he talks about you an' the other men in Douglas Keounty who air really bigger men than he is."

"Did Senator Hinckley really say that, Mr. Blair? You must have misunderstood him. He knows I have my own opinions and cannot

ON THE FENCE

be led around by any man, no matter who he is?"

"Them 's jest the words he used, Mr. Jenkins, an' when he wuz in Indynapolis he always use ter talk that way 'bout everybody down here. I 've heerd of it I don't know how many times."

The virus was working. "Senator Hinckley has done a great many things I did n't approve of while he has been in office"—Jenkins was speaking in a judicial manner, striving to conceal the anger Hiram's thrust had aroused. "At the same time there never has been a good opportunity to defeat him, and I 've never felt like taking the whole burden on myself. Several times, when he has gone to the extreme in some matter when I was interested in opposition to him, I 've threatened to lead a fight against him, but this feeling has cooled down before the campaign opened."

"I feel deeply interested in this matter, Mr. Jenkins," interposed Walter, "for while I am only a young lawyer, and inexperienced, I 've noticed the great difference between the methods you employ in trying a case and those of Senator Hinckley. You are fair, courteous, and dignified,

HIRAM BLAIR

seeking to carry your point by bringing the facts and the law that is in favor of your client clearly before the court and the jury. On the other hand, Senator Hinckley depends upon the sharp practices which lawyers are now turning over to the pettifoggers. He undertakes to distort facts and appeals to the prejudices of the jury rather than to the law. Such a man cannot represent his district in Congress with honor and integrity. According to the reports I hear from Indianapolis and Washington, Hinckley's methods there are no better than they are here in New Boston. Taking this view of the matter I conceive it to be your duty and mine, to help defeat him. You are a high-minded, straightforward man, who would scorn to stoop to the tricks that are Hinckley's most effective weapons. No one in all Douglas County has a better reputation for integrity and nobility of character than you. Yet you have been by your own confession, if you will pardon me for saying it, permitting your county and district to be represented in the highest law-making body of the land by a man who possesses neither the ability nor the honesty requisite to enable him to properly draft the laws

ON THE FENCE

we as lawyers must deal with in their application to the people."

"You are making out a case of *particeps criminis* against me, are you not, Mr. Crane? I am afraid I shall be obliged to plead guilty. I've never had occasion to think of it along that line before; your arguments certainly have weight."

Hiram came again to the fore. "Now is your chance to do your keounty an' state, ez well ez yourself, a great big favor, Mr. Jenkins. You oughter ben the candidate agin' Ol' Dave this time instead of Sam Houston an' I've thought offen I'd speak to you 'bout it but kep' puttin' it off, then Sam announced, an' that settled it. You air the logikal successor to Hinckley an' oughter retired him to private life a long time ago. But you know that Sam Houston won't try to be a leader here or anywhere else. He tells me he come out 'cause the farmers of the keounty air tired of Hinckley an' could n't git any one else to run ag'in' him. Now ef he's nomynated with your help it will make you the leader in the keounty instead of Dave, then when Sam's term runs out, it won't be any trouble at

HIRAM BLAIR

all fer you to slip into the place you oughter have. You don't owe Dave Hinckley anything, but you do owe yourself and the keounty somethin'."

"What chance has Houston? I have n't heard any one say they thought he had a show."

"Well, Walter kin tell you 'bout Morrison an' that section."

"In Morrison Senator Hinckley will not get any votes at all." Walter was prompt in giving his estimate. "That is, not more than twenty or thirty. In all the country round about Morrison a majority of the Democrats are for Houston, and the campaign has n't fairly started. Our newspaper in Morrison will support Houston vigorously, and it has a large circulation in that part of the county. I should say that Houston will have a lead of from five hundred to six hundred in Morrison and vicinity."

The news was gratefully received by Jenkins, but he tried not to display his elation. "That is a long lead to overcome; now what do you hear from other parts of the county, Mr. Blair?"

"Here in New Bosting, Hinckley will about clean the platter, but over in Sam Houston's part

ON THE FENCE

of the keounty they tell me you kin ride five miles without finding a man fer Hinckley. Houston 'll carry the four townships about him there by big majorities. Then in other townships he will git a scatterin' vote. Ef you 'll help us, we 'll win, hands down. Ef you go inter the fight ag'in' us, I 'm afeerd the old fox 'll beat us; that 's 'bout the long an' short of it."

"Well, gentlemen, you may depend upon it, I 'll not do anything against Mr. Houston. I 'll think over the matter and let you know later whether I 'll help you make the fight for him or remain neutral."

CHAPTER XVI

JOE SIMPSON LENDS A HAND

HOORAY! he 's landed," joyously exclaimed Hiram, when they reached the seclusion of the Sheriff's back office. "Now to make him fast so 's he can't git away. Oh, Joe."

Joe Simpson came in from the outer office, carefully shutting and locking the door behind him, then walked over to the window and closed the shutters. This was all the evidence he gave that he was aware an important political conference was on.

"Sit down, Joe, an' listen hard to what I 'm goin' to say, fer when you 're out of here I don't want to see no more of you till night. I want you to ketch George Jenkins on the street accidentally an' ask him how the fight is going fer Congrissman. Ef he sez he thinks Houston hez a show, you hunt up Dave Hinckley an' tell him Jenkins is about to go back on him. Be sure

SIMPSON LENDS A HAND

an' tell Jenkins you air for Hinckley, but don't dispute with him ef he thinks things air gettin' brighter fer Sam, that's all."

Joe Simpson hung around Jenkins' office waiting for him to come out for an hour, but he did not appear. Becoming impatient, Joe satisfied himself no one was in the office except Jenkins, and walked in.

"Good mornin', Jedge," he began, "hain't seed Hiram in the las' hour, hev ye? They's some people from the country in the office waitin' to see him."

"Yes, Joe," answered Jenkins, "Mr. Blair and Walter Crane were in my office consulting me on legal matters about an hour ago."

"He's with Walt Crane, is he? Then thar's no tellin' whar he's gone. Sence they started on this wild-goose chase arter Senytor Hinckley, I kain't keep no track of Hi at all."

"Houston seems to be making quite a fight," ventured Jenkins.

"Yaas, but it's allers ben that-a-way, Jedge. Somebody gits out an' tries to do up Dave Hinckley every onct in a while, but they ain't never done no good at it, an' they ain't goin' to

HIRAM BLAIR

this time. I 'm sorry Hi got inter this fight, but he 's the fightenest feller you ever see, an' kain't be satisfied onless he 's hunten fer trouble. It 's his bizness, not mine; when I tuk this job of deputy Hi an' me agreed we 'd both do just ez we pleased about polyticks, an' so he 's ag'in' Hinckley an' I 'm fer him."

"You don't think Houston has any chance then, to defeat Hinckley?" Jenkins' question betokened interest, and Joe warmed up to the subject.

"Naw, I don't; of course Hi 's a powerful smart worker, an' they do say Walt Crane kin wind them Morrison people round his fingers jest this-a-way." Joe imitated the winding of a string around his fingers.

"But, you air fer Hinckley, ain't you, Jedge?"

"Oh, I don't think I 'll take much part in it."

"Well, ef you 'd turn in an' help Hi an' Walt with Sam, that 'd make it mighty jubersome fer Dave. Sam hissself is ez helpless in polyticks ez a lost sheep, but they ain't many fellers in the keounty kin beat Hi an' Walt when it comes to figgerin' an' roundin' up the boys. You 've got

SIMPSON LENDS A HAND

more follerin' in the keounty than they hev, an' I 'd be powerful skairt ef you 'd turn out ag'in' Dave. You see, Jedge, I 'm sorter under obligashuns to help Hinckley 'cause he helped us boys out onct. A good friend of mine outen our township a few years ago got inter a leetle trouble an' got indicted. They had a purty strong case ag'in' him, an' it looked like he wuz headed straight fer Jeffsonville. But we kinder ganged together an' kum ter town an' hired Hinckley, an' he got him out on a alibi."

"An alibi!" exclaimed Jenkins. "You don't mean that, do you? It takes proof to establish an alibi."

"Yaas, some of the boys had ter help some, but the Senytor he done the heavy work. Course we paid him his fee, but I allus thought a feller could n't pay full price fer a fust-class alibi in cash."

"I should think not."

"So I 've tied up to Dave an' I hope you won't turn ag'in' him, fer I 'd be moughty skairt fer Dave ef you done it. Well, I mus' go back an' tell them folks they ain't no use waitin' fer Hi."

HIRAM BLAIR

An angry light was in George Jenkins' eye when Joe closed the door behind him.

"Got him out on an alibi, did he? So that's the kind of a man we're sending to Congress," he soliloquized savagely.

When Joe Simpson told Hiram of his alibi story, Hiram gazed at him solemnly a moment then said, "Joe, I hope you did n't larn all your infernal meanness from me. I've got enough to ansur fer myself, without standin' fer any o' yourn. Don't you be fool enough to go to braggin' to Walt 'bout how you run the blind calf over George. He'd like ez not go straight to Jenkins an' explode the hull story."

George Jenkins had another visitor that same afternoon. He came puffing into the office and stalked back to the private room, motioning in an imperious way for Jenkins to follow. He was laboring under excitement, not in the least modified by liberal potations taken during the day with political friends celebrating his homecoming.

"Come in here, George, I want to talk to you."

Jenkins followed Senator Hinckley into the rear room and closed the door. He surmised

SIMPSON LENDS A HAND

that the interview was not to be an agreeable one.

"What is this I hear about you? Are you going back on me?"

"Well, Senator, I've not said a thing against you, and have not intended to take any part in this contest. You see, Senator, the fact is, I'm in a rather embarrassing situation, and feel that you ought not ask me to declare myself. Sam Houston is an old friend of mine, one of my clients, and I cannot very well afford to get out and use my influence against him. Of course, you are my neighbor and the same is true of you."

"Sam Houston, huh! So you're goin' to turn against me after all I've done for you, just because he pays you a few paltry dollars? Did n't I make you a delegate to the last National Convention? Haven't I put you on every State delegation and did n't I try my best to get you an appointment from the Governor two years ago? And now you are breaking faith with me! What sort of a deal is that?"

"Senator Hinckley, you cannot talk that way to me; I will do just as I please, and will not

HIRAM BLAIR

stand any dictation from you. I have done more for you than you've ever done for me, and if I choose to remain neutral in this fight, you have no good right to complain. I am entirely free to do so, even to support Houston if I feel like it, and can do it with a clear conscience. If it had n't been for friends like myself the people of this county would have risen against you and put you out of office long ago."

This was too much for Hinckley, fired as he was by Joe Simpson's wily tales and his own indulgence. "Look here, George Jenkins, you are mistaken if you think I came here to ask you to support me; what I want you to do is to fight me. Then we can find out how little you really amount to in the county. Don't let your conscience hurt you. It can't stand much strain. I'll relieve it by giving you full permission and releasing you from all obligations to me for past favors. You go out and do your worst. Don't say after the fight is over that you did n't take any part in it. I want you to fight me hard. Get in with that lobster-faced yahoo in the Sheriff's office and that little featherhead lawyer from Morrison, and make the fight of your life. And



“ GO OUT AND DO YOUR WORST ”

SIMPSON LENDS A HAND

I'll tell you something more, George Jenkins; before I came home I was on a deal to buy a house in Washington, and I'm going right over to the telegraph office and wire my agent to close the deal."

"You had best not waste your franks, Hinckley, unless your supply is unlimited, as I suppose it is, judging from your votes."

"Bah! you talk like a mugwump. If you could go to Indianapolis or Washington you'd be dogging every railroad lawyer and telegraph lobbyist for passes as you do me for favors down here. How long ago was it that I got you and your family passes to Chicago? You'll have to ask Sam Houston for them in the future, and his postoffice address will be Houston, Douglas County, Indiana, just as it is now."

David Hinckley stalked out of the office and left behind him a very angry man, fully determined to move heaven and earth to defeat him. Thus, often, does quick temper and a sarcastic tongue, fired by liquor, accomplish the undoing of men of force and popularity.

CHAPTER XVII

ROSE JENKINS HAS HER TROUBLES TOO

THE New Boston Culture Club was holding its fortnightly Wednesday afternoon meeting. This club was composed of fifteen young ladies who belonged to the exclusive social circle of New Boston. Its membership was limited to fifteen and new members were taken in only when a vacancy was created through death, marriage, or removal from New Boston. There never had been a resignation since the club was organized. When there was a vacancy to fill in that charmed circle, the selection of the fortunate one to take the place was an historical event in New Boston society. The purpose of the club as stated in its constitution was to "study and exchange ideas concerning domestic science and literature." The purpose as indicated by actual practice was to exchange the latest gossip and discuss any topic that came uppermost in the minds of its members.

ROSE HAS HER TROUBLES

The latest addition to the club membership had been Rose Jenkins, daughter of George Jenkins; a beautiful, withal modest and bashful maiden of seventeen. She was voted into membership a few weeks before the quarrel between her father and Congressman Hinckley. It was fortunate for her that she had won this prize before the quarrel or she would have failed. As it was, the daughters of the Congressman were now devoting their best thought to making her life miserable by the diligent employment of those gentle arts of social discomfiture so well known to ladies of society. Florence Bassett flew to the relief of Rose. She at once took the timid and bashful girl under her protection. Florence had been Rose's most pronounced champion in the discussion which preceded the vote on selecting a member to fill the vacancy, and now there was added reason why she should defend her from the clever attacks of the Hinckley girls. Open hostilities had not yet broken out, but on several different occasions Rose had been obliged to spend an afternoon with Florence, relieving her wounded feelings by shedding bitter tears in Florence's arms because of some covert slight

HIRAM BLAIR

put upon her by the haughty daughters of the house of Hinckley.

Florence called for Rose on her way to the meeting, determined to assert herself as the champion of the frightened girl who was threatened with social ostracism because her father had declared independence of New Boston's political dictator.

Florence recognized that Rose left to her own resources would be driven out of the Culture Club by having it made so subtly but surely disagreeable she could not bear up against it. This she determined to prevent, partly by making herself a shield which should receive the veiled arrows of the Hinckley girls, and partly by compelling the other members of the club through sheer force of her own influence, to receive Rose Jenkins with graciousness and consideration.

Up to this time Rose had known nothing of political affairs, and could only understand that she had incurred the enmity of the ladies of the Hinckley family through her father's refusal to support Senator Hinckley. George Jenkins was a sweet-tempered, weak-kneed individual who always took his troubles home and scattered

ROSE HAS HER TROUBLES

them around so the entire household might share in his misery, and buoy up his despondent spirits with that partisan sympathy always so dear to men of flabby dispositions.

Rose's mother had instilled into her children an unquestioning faith in their father's infallibility, and Mr. Jenkins himself, always averse to disputes, was only too glad to acquiesce in this idea which ruled the Jenkins family. Rose therefore accepted the penalties inflicted upon her, for what the New Boston people were wont to call her father's heresy, without complaint, and with a sublime confidence that he was right but was the victim of unfortunate circumstances which had conspired to lead the rest of the people of New Boston away from the right.

Until after the storm broke about Rose's innocent head she did not know Florence took any interest in the political contest. But when she burst into tears in Florence's arms and sobbingly explained the reason why the Hinckley girls had cut her she made a double appeal to Florence's sympathy and protection. Florence at once laid bare to her friend all she had had to do with the attack on the Congressman and the girls

HIRAM BLAIR

straightway pledged themselves to support and comfort each other through all the vicissitudes of the campaign.

"Oh, Florence, I do hope the girls will not say anything cutting to me before all the club," exclaimed Rose as they left her house. "I just can't stand it; I know I'll cry if they do."

"Do not fear, Rose dear, I think I will draw all their shafts and they will not have time for you."

When they reached the house of Miss Grace Long, where the meeting was to be held, the Hinckley girls were already there. Florence did not intend to have the attack opened until after the usual volley of small talk incident to such meetings had been fired, so she was graciousness itself when they met.

"Why, Ruth, my dear, where have you been keeping yourself? Why have n't you been over to see me since you came back from Washington?" was her greeting to the elder of the girls.

"Oh, Florence, I've been up to my ears in work for two weeks. You know we only came home for a six weeks' stay, and we've had a

ROSE HAS HER TROUBLES

dressmaker down from the city, and have had to keep with her all the time."

"Yes, these city dressmakers do require so much watching; and here is Mamie! How are you? By the way, I saw you out riding the other day! You and Mr. Brown do make such a handsome couple on horseback. He seemed quite devoted."

Mamie blushed prettily, but was equal to the emergency. "I 'm surprised, Florence, that you noticed us. You had just come from the post-office, and were reading a letter. Was it from Morrison? It looked like a lawyer's brief, only it was n't brief."

Before Florence could reply to this sally Grace Long called out: "Girls, it is time to begin work. The Culture Club will now come to order!"

If a man were permitted to invade the sacred precincts of a young ladies' club in the first half hour of its session he would say that every one present was talking at one time, and no one paying attention to what any one else was saying. Yet, by some unexplainable feminine faculty they are always able to carry away with them

HIRAM BLAIR

every bit of gossip that is related at these meetings. How they manage it no one knows, not even the young ladies themselves, but everybody knows they do manage it.

When there was a lull in the chatter, Florence, who had purposely taken a seat alongside of Ruth Hinckley, with Rose on her other side, sweetly said:

"Ruth, I suppose you are looking forward to a lively time in Washington next winter. It will be the inauguration season, will it not?"

"Oh, yes, delightful! Papa has purchased a lovely house there since we came home and has promised us we may put in most of our time there except through the summer vacation."

"That will be just splendid, won't it? Has your father been elected yet? I don't know anything about politics."

"No, he has n't even been nominated yet, but he is n't in the least danger of being defeated for the nomination, and the Republicans have n't any chance at all in this district."

"Your father is certainly a fortunate man, and you girls are in great luck to have such a distinguished father. But what office is Mr.

ROSE HAS HER TROUBLES

Houston a candidate for? I hear people speaking of him a good deal."

Rose started to giggle, but Florence stepped on her foot under the skirt of her dress and she repressed the outburst with great difficulty.

"Old Sam Houston!" Ruth responded disdainfully. "He thinks he's running for Congress against papa, but it's ridiculous to think of him going to Congress. He's only a common farmer."

"I think I saw an article in the *Banner* speaking quite highly of him."

"Oh, yes, one can get these newspapers to publish anything by paying them for it. The editor told papa he did n't write the article himself, but that it was written and sent in, and he printed it just the way it was sent."

"That's the way they do in politics, is it?" Florence was mildly inquisitive. "Then your papa must be a very wealthy man to be able to afford such a splendid article as the *Banner* gave him in its last issue, and have a dressmaker from the city all in the same week."

"Oh, my papa does n't have to pay for such things. The editors write about him because he

HIRAM BLAIR

is so prominent and has done so much for the county."

"I saw something in one of the Morrison papers that intimated Mr. Houston is very strong over there."

"Papa is n't expecting any votes in Morrison. The people over there are so coarse and rough that papa can't bear to do the things one would have to do to get their votes. If a candidate expects to get votes in Morrison he must go to the saloons and purchase drinks for everybody and papa will not do that. So he is going to be nominated without asking Morrison for any help."

"I know several very nice people in Morrison. I had n't heard it is so awfully bad. Of course it is not as highly cultured as New Boston, but it is a comparatively young city. There must be some better class vote there. Perhaps your father could get some votes from the better classes if he would try."

"It's no use, Florence dear; he does n't need them, and we will feel so much better satisfied if he gets along without them. This Mr. Blair,

ROSE HAS HER TROUBLES

the Sheriff, and that young lawyer who drifted in there a few years ago from nobody knows where, have gotten the vicious element completely under their thumbs, and the better element are afraid to assert —”

“Why, Ruth, do you mean Mr. Crane? He’s Flor —” Rose blurted out indignantly, but Florence’s foot crushed her toes again, and she suddenly relapsed into silence.

Florence’s smile lost none of its graciousness from the fire burning within her breast. She had steeled herself for the encounter. “Oh, of course, if your papa can be nominated without votes from Morrison; but it would be such a terrible disappointment to you girls to have to stay here in dull old New Boston all winter away from the gay doings in Washington, especially as you have bought a house there. Was n’t there some sort of a meeting here last Saturday? I saw so many men in from the country I supposed there must be a Democratic meeting going on.”

“Yes, the County Committee met to decide whether to hold a convention or a primary.”

“Oh, yes, that was it, I remember now; and

HIRAM BLAIR

your father made a speech for a convention, and Rose's father and Mr. Crane talked for a primary, whatever that is. I read about it in the *Banner*. Did n't the committee decide in favor of a primary? I should n't have thought your father would allow that after he spoke against it."

"The old committee had been packed. The Sheriff gave out a lot of jobs to members of the committee and actually paid money for proxies, so Howard Thompson told me. But papa can win in a primary just as easy as he could in a convention, only he will have to stay here in New Boston when he ought to be in Washington."

"Perhaps so, but it seems to me if I were in your place I'd rather have won the first skirmish. It would really be a terrible blow to you girls to have your father defeated after you have set your hearts on spending the winters in the gay society of the national capital, and after he had bought a new residence in Washington, too."

Florence nudged Rose and that young lady deftly changed the subject.

"Girls, let's not talk politics, let's talk of things we know about. When is the club going

ROSE HAS HER TROUBLES

to give its annual reunion and open session?
We were to talk that over this afternoon."

The remainder of the afternoon was given up to the forming of plans for this annual affair of the Culture Club, the chief society event of New Boston.

CHAPTER XVIII

ROSE JENKINS WARNS WALTER

THE day after the Culture Club meeting Walter found it necessary to go out into the country several miles toward New Boston to try a lawsuit before a country justice of the peace on a trivial matter for one of his clients in Morrison. He drove out, and as he neared the country schoolhouse in which the trial was to be held he was surprised to notice an attractive looking young lady sitting in a buggy in front of the building. Coming nearer he discovered that the young lady was Rose Jenkins, and he at once surmised that her father was to oppose him in the case on trial. He was but slightly acquainted with Miss Jenkins, though Florence had informed him of the deep bond of sympathy that had come between the girls since the political campaign opened. He greeted her cordially, and it was evident that Rose was greatly pleased to meet him.

ROSE WARNS WALTER

"This is certainly a pleasant surprise, Miss Jenkins, when I was expecting only a dry and uninteresting lawsuit. I am very glad to meet you."

"There was n't room in the buggy for three, Mr. Crane, and Florence could n't leave New Boston to-day. I came out to keep papa company, as he said he would not be engaged in the trial long," Rose gasped in a half-frightened way. "He said the other side has a poor case and not much of a lawyer."

If Walter had not laughed off this sally, Rose would have been crushed, but he retorted gleefully, "You just wait about an hour, Miss Jenkins, and you will have the pleasure of taking home the humblest father you ever had. When I get through with him, you will have to help him into the buggy."

Rose was delighted that her impetuous outburst was accepted so graciously, and replied joyously, "Whatever you do, do it quickly, for I have some news to give you."

The trial was soon over. Mr. Jenkins was in no hurry to get away, as he had a number of friends and acquaintances in the crowd. So Rose

HIRAM BLAIR

had ample time to tell Walter of the happenings of the past few days in New Boston.

"Oh, Mr. Crane, has Florence told you about the Culture Club meeting yesterday? It was quite horrifying."

"No, Miss Jenkins, I have n't heard from Florence since yesterday. There were no serious casualties were there?"

Rose stammered, as if afraid to say what was in her mind, but finally screwed her courage up. "No, unless there were internal injuries."

"Tell me about it. I am all curiosity."

"It will be a mean trick for me to take advantage of Florence and tell it before she has a chance, but I know she has written you, and she will tell it so much better than I do it will be almost the same as if you had n't heard it. Florence and Ruth Hinckley had a regular word duel at the Culture Club meeting yesterday afternoon, and I came very near spoiling it all, but when it was all over, Florence came out with flying colors. Then we planned for our annual reunion, and Florence, the dear, brave girl, is going to fly in the face of all the rules of the club

ROSE WARNS WALTER

and invite you to go with her instead of a New Boston young man."

"Do you think it will be safe for me to come?"

"No, I don't, but of course you will; you couldn't help doing anything that Florence asked you to do. I'm not going to invite any of those hateful New Boston boys. They are all doing everything they can to elect Senator Hinckley, and I'm going to take my brother. Florence told me this morning she is going to persuade one of the girls to invite my brother and compel me to invite one of the other boys. She says she does not intend to allow me to help her protect you from 'the slings and arrows of outraged New Boston.'"

"If it is going to be as bad as that, perhaps I had better not go," Walter solemnly replied.

"Oh, I think you would rather face the wrath of all New Boston than disappoint Florence. If you would n't you don't love her as she deserves to be loved — Here comes papa, and I must get him started home before he gets to talking about Hendricks' chances for President to

HIRAM BLAIR

any more of these farmers. Good-bye, Mr. Crane."

That evening Walter found in his mail a long letter from Florence, telling him of the incident at the Culture Club meeting and explaining that in defiance of the long-established rule of the Culture Club she intended to take him to this reunion. "Every member is allowed to invite just one gentleman, and every young man in New Boston is wild to get an invitation. Only members and their escorts may attend. You are to go with me, and you will be the only gentleman from out of town invited. The rule against inviting outsiders is not an actual law, but the custom has been followed so long the New Boston people seem to think it is as well established as the law of the Medes and Persians. They know I want to ask you, but few believe I will do such violence to the sacred traditions of New Boston."

CHAPTER XIX

THE CAMPAIGN WARMS UP

“**W**ELL, Walt, old man, we’ve gone an’ done the thing we did n’t want to do.”

Hiram Blair walked into Walter Crane’s office in Morrison with this announcement and dropped into the chair nearest the cuspidor.

“We’ve got Ol’ Dave skairt clean out er his boots, an’ he’s puttin’ on his war paint. He telegraphed to Washin’ton yestiddy to hev what they call a general pair fixed fer him to las’ on-til after the primary, an’ he’s goin’ to stay right here in Douglas Keounty.”

“That’s strange,” soberly replied Walter. “Mr. Hinckley made a great point in his speeches last campaign of promising his constituents he would not make any pairs but would stay in Washington and attend to the people’s business.”

“Yes, but thet was two years ago; Ol’ Dave

HIRAM BLAIR

sez to one of his frien's yestiddy that ez long's he's got a pair of coyotes follerin' his trail here at hum he kain't be blamed fer makin' pairs in Washington. Them coyotes he's mentionin', Walt, is me an' you. I wisht he'd went back an' let his fellers here tell him how easy sailin' he wuz havin'. But he's too foxy fer thet. Did you notice him the day we fixed up the committee on him an' got a primary? You cud a knocked off his eyes with a stick after them committeemen voted, an' how he did cuss 'em thet afternoon! The way he talked to fellers thet had ben votin' the way he tol' 'em for twenty year you'd think they'd backslid frum the church an' los' their chanst fer salvation. But the ol' fox ain't takin' no chances hisself, now he's cooled down. It'll take three men to watch him from here out. I wish Sam Houston knowed somethin' 'bout politics."

"Don't get discouraged, Hiram; I'm sorry he's frightened so soon, but that's a hopeful sign for us."

"Oh, fiddlesticks, boy, I ain't discouraged. But we've got ter fight him. Thet's what I come to talk 'bout. He's shakin' up things

THE CAMPAIGN WARMS UP

lively these days. He's had three fellers to George Jenkins this week tellin' him it 'll never do fer him to go ag'in' his own home man."

"Have they had any effect on Jenkins?"

"No, I kain't see thet they hev. You see, besides the rasping Ol' Dave give Jenkins, the gals hev turned the cold shoulder on his daughter, so George tol' me, an' thet cooked Ol' Dave's goose with him fer sure. You an' Jenkins will hev to make some speeches purty soon. That 'll be a leetle rough on the people, but the ol' man is goin' to speechify an' we 'll hev to hev some oratin' did, too."

"Have you talked to Jenkins about this?"

"Don't haf ter. He never wuz knowed to miss a chanst to make a speech. That part of it is easy. The hard part is to keep him frum sayin' things that 'll hurt us insted of Ol' Dave. You 'll haf ter go with him an' let him make the leadin' speech, an' ef he makes any fool breaks, you kin fix 'em up some way."

"I'm afraid you are asking too much from me."

"That ain't all, either. You an' me will haf ter give him a goin' over before we put him on the

HIRAM BLAIR

track, an' take the foolishness out er him. He wants to abuse Ol' Dave like a hoss thief, an' you know how poor an' out of thet he'd make. 'Bout the fust time Ol' Dave'd turn loose on him, he'd take to the woods like a cur dog. Ez soon 's you kin, you git your own speech blocked out an' one fer him, too, an' come over to New Bosting an' we'll get hol' of Jenkins an' make him b'leeve it's his idees, and then he'll go out an' orate 'em with ez much airs ez if he wuz C'lumbus discovering Americky. Have you looked up the Senytor's record?"

"Yes, partially, in the State Senate. It's rather hard to get much of a line on a new Congressman; we'll have to depend chiefly on his record in Indianapolis. He has been in on every measure of a questionable character so far as I am able to learn."

"Of course, of course; but don't figger too much on thet. What you want to find out is how he voted on the stock law, the dog law and them kind of things. These here farmers don't keer a cuss ef Ol' Man Pullman does git ez much for uppers ez he does fer lower berths, 'cause they don't never use either kind. Get after

THE CAMPAIGN WARMS UP

the Senytor on laws the farmers is worryin' 'bout."

"Don't you think, Hi, that the people of the county would turn against him if they knew that he votes for corrupt measures invariably?"

"Gosh, Walt, you air simple! How do you s'pose he's goin' to buy their votes ef he don't sell his own? Do you think these people is goin' to kill the goose thet lays the golden egg? You take my advice an' look up his record on the dog law. By the way, I've got some more bad news fer you."

"Let's have it all at once."

"You know Joe Simpson is my private detective agency? He made a report yestiddy. They don't give him a front seat in their meetin's, an' when anythin' is real private he gits to stay outside. But John Ward the Keounty Treasurer, he's from the same township ez Joe, an' Joe's got the township purty well lined up sence he got ter be deputy, so John kain't go back on him. He tells Joe what happens in their meetin's an' Joe tells me. They've got their plans laid to steal a march on you here in Morrison."

HIRAM BLAIR

"They can't do that, Hi; they have n't any one to lead their fight."

"Mebbe not, Walt, but they've got things workin' to throw all the railroad vote to Hinckley. You know, he's got a stand-in with the head officers of both these railroads, an' they have give orders to their political fixers to git the men to vote for Hinckley."

"The men won't do it."

"Don't fool yourself, my boy; the men will do it, just ez Joe Simpson will vote fer Sam Houston. Ef he was n't workin' fer me, he'd be out in his township with his coat off workin' fer Hinckley. You'll hev to figger out some plan to git ahead of 'em on this. You kin do it."

"What else did Joe learn as to their intentions in Morrison."

"They're goin' to find three or four good men down here to handle their money just before the primary an' not make any noise 'bout it till primary day, too late fer you to git any money an' put in the fight."

"That is really interesting. There are a good many voters here who like the look of money

THE CAMPAIGN WARMS UP

about election time, but I had supposed Hinckley would know all his money would be wasted if he placed it in Morrison. Why does n't he spend his money where it will do him some good."

"They air countin' on placin' their boodle in the townships where we air figgerin' on havin' everything our own way. But I 'm goin' to give Sam Houston a story that 'll make his hair stan' on end, the next time I see him. He's got so now he wants to go to Congriss so bad he kin taste it. He'll sell a farm or two ef it comes to thet. Now, Walt, I've got ter go out into the country a ways to serve some papers, an' I'll be back this afternoon. You'd better git the township committee together an' some of the boys, and we'll talk over the campaign. Make it 'bout four o'clock."

CHAPTER XX

POLITICS AND RELIGION

THE first meeting in the interest of Houston's candidacy was in the afternoon at Freetown near Houston's home, and it was quite successful. A large crowd of Houston's neighbors and friends gathered to listen to the speeches of Jenkins and Crane.

Florence Bassett and Rose Jenkins drove out, expecting that when the meeting was over Rose would return to New Boston with her father, leaving Walter and Florence to drive back together. When Hiram heard of this arrangement he vetoed it promptly.

"Look here, Walt, that gal o' yourn got us inter this trouble an' she mus' not interfere. You tell her to run along home an' you an' me and George Jenkins will round up these fellers out here and lay plans fer carryin' a few townships fer Houston. Wimmen suffrage, if it ever comes, may change things moughtily, but up to now no man

POLITICS AND RELIGION

ever cut any figger in polyticks with a woman sittin' in his lap."

Walter's face fell. "Florence will be greatly disappointed. She was expecting me to tell her all about how the campaign is going as we drove back to town."

"You tell her an' the Jenkins gal to tell one another on the road home the things the Hinckley gals hev ben sayin' 'bout the good times they air spectin' to hev in Washington nex' winter, an' they 'll forgit all 'bout you. Now go an' shake 'em ez quick ez you kin."

It was several hours later that Walter and Hiram found themselves on the homeward road after the conference. Reports had been received from Houston's friends in the west part of the county and plans laid for putting them all at work. They were cheered up by rosy reports of Houston's strong showing in Morrison, and Hiram insisted there was not the slightest doubt of Houston's nomination if his own part of the county did its duty.

The two friends found one of their chief pleasures in the hard work of the campaign to be the long drives from one part of the county to

HIRAM BLAIR

another, when they could throw off the restraint of the politician and talk freely to one another, each saying exactly what was in his mind, with no fear of injuring the cause by an unguarded remark. In these long drives, Hiram was always at his best.

“What do you really think of the prospects so far as we’ve gone, Hi?”

“We’re goin’ to beat ’em, Walt, but it’s goin’ to be the all-firedest hardest fight Douglas Keounty ever seen. Dave Hinckley is the slickest politician workin’ fer hisself there is in the hull State of Indiany. He kin think of more tricks to turn in less time than any man in the State. He kin come nearer makin’ a gosh-durned lie soun’ like the gospel truth than any man this side of hell. He don’t haf ter make no affydavits. He tells his lies in that solum, pious way of his’n an’ everybody jus’ natchally b’leeves ’em. All the fellers that air workin’ with us, Walt, is kinergarden polytichuns ’cepting only me an’ you, an’ you hain’t got no diplomy in this kinder work. They don’t know how things air goin’. A feller’d think from what they tol’ us back there to-night Sam is goin’ to sweep this

POLITICS AND RELIGION

side of the keounty slick ez a platter after the dogs hez ben to it, but he ain't; it 'll crowd him awful clost to come out even on this side; an' George Jenkins talkin' 'bout makin' inroads on him in New Bosting! That's baby talk.

"You know, Walt, out West in the ranchin' country when a rancher gits his brand on a steer, that settles it. Ef a feller monkeys with animals thet hev another feller's brand on 'em an' gets ketched at it, he 'd better begin makin' his 'rangements fer a long journey on a one-way ticket. Now, my boy, Dave Hinckley hez put his brandin' irons on them New Bosting people an' they 're his'n. We cut one steer out er the bunch, George Jenkins, an' now we've got our brand on him, but that's all. New Bosting an' all the country round is ag'in' us. It's Morrison we've got ter depend on."

"Is it true that Hinckley owes nearly all the merchants in New Boston all the time?"

"Hain't you larned, Walt, thet the surest way to keep people interested in your doin' well is to git in debt to 'em? Dave Hinckley knows it. He buys from all the storekeepers in New Bosting an' pays 'em when he makes a stake.

HIRAM BLAIR

When he wuz in Indynapolis the storekeepers use ter make up his bills soon's they heerd a boodle bill passed the Legislature. An' he allus pays just like a feller settlin' up after he's ben on a spree; never asks for items, only the foot-in's. No wonder he's popylar in New Bosting. Why, Walt, he's purty near the only industry in the town that fetches in furrin' capytal. We've got ter slip up on him in some of the townships out in the keounty where he thinks he's solid."

"Is Senator Hinckley a member of the Campbellite Church, Hi?"

"Don't you ever let anybody in Indiany hear you call that church Campbellite ag'in, Walt, if you expect to be a politishun. Call it the Christian Church. Yes, he's a member in good standin', an' he pays the church jes' the same ez he pays the storekeepers. The parson is one of his political standbys. By the way, Walt, you know a heap 'bout things ginerally, kin you explain why it is the Christian Church cuts so much more figger in Indiany polytics then the other churches do?"

Walt lighted a cigar and puffed at it a few

POLITICS AND RELIGION

minutes, then: "I did n't know you took any interest in religious matters, Hi!"

"Oh, yes, I 've allus intended jinin' the church some time, but my health hez ben so powerful good all the time I 've never felt called yit. But if you kin explain why the Campbellite brethren stick so clost together I 'd be obleeged to you."

"Really, Hi, I do not know unless it can be explained on the general theory that associations of individuals formed in a spirit of independence or revolt, I might say, from old established customs, usually are bound together by stronger ties than others."

Hiram pulled the horses down to a walk. "Walt, ef you 're goin' to terrorize on this subjec', you 'll hev to go mighty slow so 's I kin foller; I 'm not a fast goer when it comes to religi'n."

"You see, Hi," Walter dropped into more commonplace language, "the Christian Church some years ago broke away from the Baptist Church, which was before that time the one church holding baptism by total immersion to be the only method in strict accordance with the

HIRAM BLAIR

teaching of the Bible. The Christian Church was organized by members of that church who disagreed with some of the other denominational doctrines while holding steadfastly to belief in baptism by immersion. The seceders believed, for one thing, in open instead of close communion. You understand what that means?"

"Yes," assented Hiram, "it's lettin' the hired help eat at the same table with the fam'ly."

"That's not it exactly, but you understand what I mean. The Christian Church was established by Rev. Alexander Campbell, a man of great force of character and giant intellect; positive, virile, and magnetic. Besides being a natural leader of men, Alexander Campbell was so firmly devoted to his convictions, so pious, sincere, and full of confidence in the rightfulness of his course that he inspired a spirit of absolute faith and religious fervor in his followers, much like that which filled the hearts of men in the days of the Crusades.

"Campbell and his followers boldly declared that they alone were following in its full meaning the Bible teaching, and to emphasize this contention they adopted the name 'Christian.' The

POLITICS AND RELIGION

other denominations, unwilling to concede even the name, met this by dubbing the new church 'Campbellite,' inferring that they were followers of Campbell, and had no right to the name of 'Christian.' Therefore, it follows that simply the use of the name shows bias. If one refers to the church as the 'Campbellite,' that in itself is taken as a denial of the claims of the church.

"So the Christian Church was born under a war cloud and has grown into strength through conflict. This has drawn its members more closely together and they feel themselves more strongly obligated to assist and protect one another. This has been the case since the world began. The bonds which hold men together are welded more firmly by opposition than by any other force. When a member of the Christian Church becomes a candidate for office, his brethren are naturally more inclined to support him on this account than is the case with other churches. Alexander Campbell lived in Indiana and the church was founded in this State. It has grown rapidly and is now, perhaps, the strongest numerically of any Protestant Church in Indiana."

HIRAM BLAIR

"Do you s'pose, Walt, they will stick together like that allers?" There was an anxious tone in Hiram's voice. "I 'd kinder like to know, 'cause every time I go to a revival meetin' I git excited, an' I 'd like to know which way to go ef I tuk a sudden noshun."

Walter was grave. "I hope, Hiram, you will never join the church when you are thinking of your own selfish interests. Selfishness and hypocrisy are Satan's most potent agencies, and when a man defiles one of God's temples by walking into its sacred precincts wearing a cloak of hypocrisy and selfishness he is committing an unpardonable sin. The man who has so little reverence for the religion of his God as to use it to further his own selfish purpose is possessed of devils, however pious he may seem. If you should ever profess religion, and I do not think you are sincere, but that you are a sacrilegious hypocrite, I shall surely cut your acquaintance. More than that, I do not enjoy joking about religious subjects in a way that tends to make light of the Christian religion."

Hiram touched up the horses and smoked his pipe vigorously for several minutes, then turning

POLITICS AND RELIGION

to Walter he placed his hand on his shoulder and said, very seriously:

“Walt, hain’t it ever struck you how easy it is fer a feller to make a goshdurned fool of hisself? It did me, jes’ now. But, honest, I ’d like to know what you think ’bout the Christian brethren stickin’ together fer keeps.”

Walter was mollified, as he always was when Hiram became serious. “As to that, Hiram, I do not believe the present condition will last many years. The Christian Church is growing rapidly both in numbers and in influence. Throughout the Middle West it is spreading wonderfully and within a few years it will be abreast of the other Protestant Churches. When that time comes the revolutionary spirit which holds together the founders of the church and their present followers will give way to a broader, more utilitarian —”

“Whoa, youngster!” exclaimed Hiram, “you ’ll haf ter run a harrer over that last word and break it up some.”

“Excuse me, Hiram,” laughed Walter, “I did forget myself, I ’ll admit. I mean that as the Christian Church becomes strong enough to stand

HIRAM BLAIR

alongside of the other denominations its members will cease to give its welfare so much of their attention, as it is strong enough to do without it, and will adopt the broader policy of the greatest good to the greatest number."

"I guess I see," Hiram gave a dubious assent. "It's like what we're doin' to Sam Houston. So long 's he wuz pore an' only hed enuff to feed his own fam'ly, we let him spend all his money on his folks, but now he's rich an' indydependent, we've put him inter polyticks, an' made one of them things with the long name outen him."

"I don't know, Hi, but that is a fairly good illustration of the idea," replied Walter. "But tell me, Hiram, how does it happen that the Christian Church has become the leading church of New Boston? The New Boston people came originally from Massachusetts, and it would be natural to suppose they would be Presbyterians, especially the old families."

"That wuz another of Ol' Dave's sly tricks. He come from Virginny, an' he b'longed to the Baptists. They wuz small pertaters an' few in a hill so long ez the Presbyterians wuz bossin'

POLITICS AND RELIGION

things. So Dave, he got a Campbellite preacher who wuz his friend to come ter New Bosting an' hol' protracted meetin's. Dave hisself sorter hel' off a right smart spell till the preacher had gathered quite a bunch, then he j'ined. They in-wiggled the Presbyterian parson into a joint debate —"

"They did what to him?"

"Inwiggled him. You've offen gone out inter the paster with a pan of oats in your han' an' a halter behin' your back to tole a young hoss up, an' then slipped the halter on him afore he knowed it, hain't you? That's what they done to this down-east parson."

"Oh! you mean inveigled?"

"P'r'aps I do. There's a leaf or two tore out er my dickshunary; but ef you'd seed that Presbyterian preacher wigglin' when the Campbellite parson got to goin' after him good you'd never pestered me about thet word. Ol' Dave got the deep-water man to work on Mrs. Bassett, an' she went over, then the little sheep an' the lambs, they came follerin' in a flock — that's how the church got its holt on New Bosting, an' Ol' Dave

HIRAM BLAIR

done it 'cause he wuz smart enough to see that the church wuz boun' to plough a wide furrer in the polyticks of this here State."

Hiram had another long spell of silence, apparently absorbed in serious thought. At length he spoke. "Walt, you're so goldurned serious an' finicky 'bout some things I kin never tell when you're goin' to blow up. I don't want to fall out with you never, an' I reckon I mought ez well own up to one of my mean tricks now when you kain't afford to throw me down. I hain't never tol' you how I tried onct to j'ine the Christian Church, hev I?"

"No, you never did, and this is as good a time as any."

"It wuz one of the reasins why I tuk up with this wildcat politikal scheme of yourn."

CHAPTER XXI

HOW HIRAM TRIED TO BREAK INTO SOCIETY

HIRAM handed the reins to Walter and carefully refilled his pipe so it would not need filling again until he was through with his story. Having lighted it with Walter's cigar and resumed the reins, he began:

"You know, Walt, I wuz born an' raised on Hoss Creek out there from Morrison an' wuz nuthin' but a green country boy, but ambishus ez a full-blooded colt. When I got ol' enough to git married I went down to Southwest Missouri an' foun' a gal mos' as green ez I wuz, only she had managed someway to scare up enough eddycashun to teach a little school out there in the woods. She had all the points necessary to make jus' the sort of a wife I need. We got along swimmingly out on the farm, before I got the offis-seekin' noshun inter my head, an' we thought the world wuz jest ez good to us ez it needed to be. But when we come to New

HIRAM BLAIR

Bosting I got the idee into my head that bein' ez I wuz high Sheriff of Douglas Keounty, we oughter be some punkins in sassiety. My wife wuz skairt of sassiety in town, an' did n't want to resk it, but I felt the responsibility of my office demanded that we mix in with the upper ten. I kep' thinkin' 'bout it, an' finally worked myself up to the point where I felt I'd be real happy ef I cud find in our mail some mornin' one of them big, square envelopes that 's got seelin' wax on the back with figgers punched in it, invitin' Sheriff Blair an' wife to some sassiety fixin'."

"That was a vain and foolish ambition, Hiram." Walter interrupted, gravely.

"Vain, anyhow, but I had it an' had it bad. You see, where we come from, ef anybody wuz goin' to have some soshal doin's they 'd jist drive over to the neighbors an' sing out:

" 'Say, Sal! we 're goin' to hev a little comp'ny over at our house to-morrer night; bring John an' the young uns an' come over.'"

"That was all right in the country, but I did n't think it wuz in keepin' with the dignity of my office, so when the New Bosting 'ristocrats did n't order no more visitin' cards printed after

TRYING TO BREAK INTO SOCIETY

we come to town then they had before, I kep' tryin' to figger out some way to swing the thing and git into the swim; finally I heerd somewheres that sassiety folks air awful particklar about the churches they go to, an' I calkilated I 'd solved the puzzle. You know, Walt, my wife is a Southern Methodist an' thinks a good deal of the church but some way or other they don't seem to be any great shakes in New Bosting sassiety.

"So after studyin' it out a long time I made up my mind we oughter b'long to the swell church an' that ef we did, the big square envelopes with the wax figgers on the backs of 'em would be comin' to us. I did n't say anythin' to my wife 'bout it, an' I 'm glad I did n't for I b'leeve it would 've broke her heart to give up the church she wuz raised in."

"Did you think of joining the church yourself, Hiram? I never heard of your having experienced religion."

"I got purty plenty of sperience, but it wuz n't religious. You know Dave Hinckley is a elder in the Christian Church, an' he kinder bosses the church. So one mornin' I walked into his offis

HIRAM BLAIR

big ez life, an' after passin' the time o' day, I sez:

“‘Senytor, since I’m the high Sheriff of Douglas Keounty I feel like I oughter measure up to the offis an’ be a credit to the party that put me in this high an’ responsible position, an’ I’ve come to you, bein’ ez you air the leadin’ Democrat an’ the biggest man in the keounty, to ask your advice on a matter that hez ben botherin’ me a heap.’

“He wuz pleased at that, but still he wuz kinder distant. He swelled up like a turkey gobbler an’ sez, ‘Well, Mr. Sheriff, I’ll be glad to advise you on anythin’ that’s fer the good of the party or the people.’ I tol’ him that I’d ben thinkin’ the Sheriff, bein’ the highest execytive officer in the keounty, oughter amount to some-
thin’ in a soshal way, an’ that I’d made up my mind we’d ben headed off ’cause my wife wuz a member of the Southern Methydist Church an’ what I wanted wuz to ask his advice ’bout havin’ her come over to his church an’ me come in, too. I could see he wuz freezin’ up ez I wuz talkin’, but I wuz started, so I kep’ plunging ahead like a runaway team headed fer the river. When I

TRYING TO BREAK INTO SOCIETY

stopped he wuz standin' up lookin' ez pious an' ez solem ez a justice of the peace tryin' his fust case, an' he sez:

" 'Mr. Blair, if I am to understan' by your somewhat muddled statement that you hev seen the error of your way an' exspeerenced a change of heart, I am very glad to know it, an' b'leeve it will be a most marked change for the better. But it is my belief that a man kin allus serve his Master best by uniting with the church his wife b'longs to.'

"By that time I had hold of my hat, an' wuz edgin' fer the door. I did n't stop to bid him good mornin', I wuz too anxious to git out where the wind could blow on me. I know'd then there wuz to be no sassiety fer me and Suse while we stayed in New Bosting. I made up my mind ez soon ez I come to that I'd give up the idee, but I'd take a fall outen the Senytor the fust chanst I got. An' that's how come me to jine this neefaryous kinspiracy ag'in' one of Indiany's greatest statesmen, ez the New Bosting people calls it. When Ol' Dave wuz drowndin' my sassiety ambitions with ice water, he wuz pouring water on your wheel without knowin' it, Walt."

HIRAM BLAIR

"It is wonderful, Hi, how the wheel of fortune does go around," sagely remarked Walter. "Senator Hinckley kept you out of New Boston society, and now if we are not miserably mistaken, you will be the means of visiting vengeance on his daughters by closing the doors of Washington society to them. No one would think to look at you that you would be a controlling factor in any one's *entrée* into society in the National Capital, either."

"No, that's a fact, Walt, an' you allus bear this in mind in dealin' with men in polyticks — you kin never tell how fur a rabbit kin jump by the size of his ears, nor how much fat kin be put on the bones of a razor back hog."

CHAPTER XXII

HINCKLEY AROUSES WALTER'S IRE

THE next morning Walter Crane and George Jenkins drove up to the post-office in New Boston on their way to Somerset, where a Houston meeting was to be held that afternoon. As they stopped, Jenkins alighted from the buggy to get the morning mail which had just been distributed. David Hinckley was coming out of the door with several friends. He observed the two, but ignoring Walter, stepped to the edge of the walk and greeted Jenkins with a show of cordiality.

"How are you, Jenkins? Fine morning—hear you had a good meeting yesterday."

"Good morning, Senator," responded Jenkins, betraying in spite of himself a little elation at being given so much attention by the Congressman.

"Yes, we had a very good meeting. It was over in Houston's neighborhood."

HIRAM BLAIR

By this time Hinckley was standing on the curb alongside of Jenkins, who noticed that he had not spoken to Walter. He said:

"Senator, you know Mr. Crane, do you not?"

Hinckley reached and shook hands with Walter, saying in his suavest manner:

"Pleased to meet you, sir; what did you say is the name?"

Walter flushed crimson. He had spoken on the same platform with Hinckley several times in the preceding State campaign when he was making his canvass for Congress, and always heretofore Hinckley had treated him with great consideration. This was the first time they had met squarely since the County Committee meeting, and it was evident Hinckley intended to cut him direct. Jenkins did not understand and he fell into the trap.

"Why, this is Walter Crane, Senator."

"Oh, yes — Crane; your face seems familiar; where do you live, Mr. Crane?"

Walter kept his temper by a strong effort. "In Morrison, Senator; it's in your county, over on the east side."

"Ah, yes; Morrison is growing rapidly, is n't

HINCKLEY AROUSES WALTER'S IRE

it? You must be a newcomer. How long have you lived there, Mr. — ah — Crane?"

"Long enough, Senator, to have had some influence with the County Committeemen from that township."

"Humph! then you are a Democrat, are you? I'll have your name put on my seed list. My entire allotment for this term has been exhausted, but I'll send you some next term."

The crowd of Hinckley men standing in front of the postoffice let out a loud guffaw at this, and Jenkins at last became aware that Hinckley was intending to humiliate Walter. He rushed on into the postoffice and under cover of the laugh at Walter's expense Hinckley passed on out of hearing, leaving Walter without opportunity to reply. He was boiling with anger and could not have met this last sally in a way to offset it even if Hinckley had given him the chance.

Florence met Walter at the door when he arrived at the Bassett home the next Sunday afternoon, and without waiting for him to enter the house, she exclaimed:

"Oh, Walter, let us go for a walk. I want

HIRAM BLAIR

to talk with you alone, and I know Rose Jenkins will come over this afternoon, then we cannot have any time to ourselves. Besides, your friend, the Sheriff, is likely to take you away from me any time."

"Which one are you more jealous of, Florence, Rose Jenkins or Mr. Blair?"

"Really, dear, I can hardly tell; I have n't given Rose any chance with you yet, and the dear child does n't know what it is to be in love. I am not exactly jealous of Rose, now, but as the doctors say, I have all the premonitory symptoms."

"And what about Hiram Blair?"

"It is n't jealousy at all in his case, Walter; but when a girl really and truly loves a man there is something deep down in her inmost heart that begrudges his companionship to any one else whom she knows he likes. She cannot avoid wondering if there is n't something lacking in his love for her when he is able to find more satisfaction in the companionship of another man than in her society. The natural consequence is that somewhere in the innermost recesses of her

HINCKLEY AROUSES WALTER'S IRE

heart there is a smouldering spark of dislike, I might almost say jealousy, of the boon companions of her lover, and this is especially true if there is one who is much closer to him than any other. I don't think, Walter, I am different from other girls in this. There's Grace Long. She's engaged to Raymond Westchester, and she just despises Julius Meyer, who has been his chum since they were small boys. Before she fell in love with Raymond she and Julius were quite good friends."

Walter's face wore an expression of pained interest as Florence finished this disquisition on the foibles of a woman's love. It was clear that he did not fully understand how to take what she said or how to answer her.

"Would you then expect your husband to give up all his men friends?"

"No, I suppose not;" Florence was still thoroughly in earnest and was speaking in a matter-of-fact manner. "I don't believe I would be that foolish; but if he did, I'm afraid I could never bring myself to urge him to call them back."

HIRAM BLAIR

"Do you not believe, my dear," Walter ventured, "that the obligations of friendship rest more firmly upon men than upon women?"

"Perhaps they do, but the binding ties of love encompass a woman much more closely than they do a man; you remember the words of the poet,

"Man's love is of man's life, a thing apart;
"T is woman's whole existence.'"

Walter was silent. He was thinking of the future,—of the activities and the achievements his bounding ambition had pictured along its course. He thought how necessary to the career he had mapped out for himself would be the close friends he had and those he hoped to gain. He was wondering what a tangled skein this life is with its loves and jealousies; its friendships and enmities. Florence's quick intuition caught the trend of his thoughts, and she reassured him with —

"Walter, you must not think for a moment that I would ask you to so devote yourself to me as to sacrifice the accomplishment of any of your purposes or plans. But still you must remember that reason is not a part of a woman's love."

HINCKLEY AROUSES WALTER'S IRE

"I think I understand you now, but if I should tell Hiram Blair you are beginning to become jealous of him, he would burst with pride."

"How do you think the campaign is coming on, Walter?" Florence was anxious to change the subject. "That was a good meeting you had last week, and I was very proud of you. Rose praised your speech all the way to New Boston, and the distance seemed unusually short to me."

"We think we will win, but find that Senator Hinckley is making a very effective campaign. He is giving us plenty of trouble." Walter had resolved not to tell Florence of the postoffice episode unless she heard of it from some one else.

"I am sure he is not certain of winning, I can tell by the way the girls act with me. They are as sweet as ever when they meet me, but they never do meet me now if they can avoid it. Then when we do meet they always try to talk of other things than the campaign."

"We received good reports from all the townships over in the west part of the county at the meeting after the speech-making that night, but Hiram says the reports are altogether too rosy. Senator Hinckley has put some plans at work

HIRAM BLAIR

to undermine Houston's strength in Morrison, and I'm afraid he is going to give me some hard work to do at home where I naturally expected easy sailing."

"Why, Ruth Hinckley told me her papa was going to win without trying to get any votes from Morrison, because the people over there are beneath his notice."

Walter's laugh awoke the echoes. "I wish Hiram Blair could hear you say that. He would tell you never to look a gift horse in the mouth."

"What does that mean in this connection?"

"It would mean that information given you by your political opponents should be valued as highly as a gift horse."

After they had talked for some time of the progress of the campaign Florence broke in with: "Before we go home, Walter, I wanted to talk to you about something that has been troubling me lately, and you are the only person I can tell about it."

"What is it, dear?"

"It's about the condition of mother's health. She appears to be in good health, but she is

HINCKLEY AROUSES WALTER'S IRE

suffering from a nervous trouble Dr. Robertson does not seem able to cure. He says treatment of itself can be of little help in such nervous troubles, and that freedom from care is the only thing to restore her to her former strength."

"Why, has your mother any serious responsibility?"

"Ever since my father retired from active business he has refused to take any of the responsibility of our affairs. You know, papa is a good many years older than mamma, so when he reached the age of sixty-five, he concluded he had worked out his allotted years of labor. He sold out his business, invested his savings in bonds and property and declared he would live the rest of his years in peace and quiet."

"He does n't seem to go in for peace much when I'm around. He always wants to quarrel about politics."

"Oh, he does n't want to quarrel — only to argue. You could n't make him angry in a political argument, and that is about the only thing he will take any interest in now. The habit of allowing mamma to have her own way in all our affairs has grown on them both, so it is really

HIRAM BLAIR

impossible so far as I can see to make any change."

"Do the business matters require much attention?"

"No, it is not that so much. It is n't the really important things that worry mamma, but it is the details. Even while papa was in business he never interfered with mamma in home affairs, but told her always to have her own way entirely at home and to let him have his own way in his affairs. Now that papa refuses to take responsibility for anything, mamma feels she has too much to do and this worries her, especially as the property is so arranged she cannot dispose of it to suit herself."

"Does she receive and pay out all the money?"

"Oh, yes; and there is where some of the worry comes in. She has acquired an intense dislike for the renting of houses, and made up her mind to sell all the rented property except that in the business district. She put it in the hands of a real estate agent and papa did not say a word until one day the agent came out with a purchaser for one of the houses. When the papers were offered to papa to sign, he just politely said he

HINCKLEY AROUSES WALTER'S IRE

had made up his mind not to have anything to do with business and signing a deed would be business."

"Did he stick to it?"

"Stick? If you knew papa you would n't ask that question. The real estate agent and the man who wanted to buy the property were furious. When they found it was no use talking to papa any longer the agent asked:

"What about my commission? I've sold this property and am entitled to my commission."

"Papa said that was a business matter and he would have to talk to mamma about it. He did talk to her, and the result was she was obliged to pay him. Then when she scolded papa for letting her get into all this trouble, he only laughed at her and told her people had to pay for experience."

"Then your mother was furious, too, I suppose."

"Yes, but she has grown so accustomed to papa's ways she did n't say much to him. I had to stand the brunt of her discomfiture. It is n't that mamma ever treats me unkindly; she is as good and kind to me as can be, but she worries herself

HIRAM BLAIR

into nervous headaches and her intense suffering distresses me beyond measure. I try to relieve her all I can of the responsibilities, but you know how people are whose nerves are all unstrung. They seem to worry more over what they do not know is right than over what they know is wrong."

"You certainly are in an unfortunate situation, sweetheart; I wish I knew something I could do to help you. Why don't you suggest to your mother that the renting houses all be put into the hands of an agent? That would relieve her of this much care at least."

"I have; but the only agent in New Boston who can be trusted is the one who compelled her to pay him the commission, and she will not give him any business. I don't know, Walter, that you can do anything to help us, but it is such a great relief to talk with you about it, for I know you sympathize with me and that helps me so much."

"I think I could get Mr. Jenkins to look after the renting houses and any other affairs that your mother would be willing to turn over to him. He is careful and reliable."

HINCKLEY AROUSES WALTER'S IRE

"Thank you, Walter. I'll speak to mamma about it and if she consents to turn the business over to him, I will ask you to arrange the details. Now let us go back to the house; Rose Jenkins will be dying to see you."

CHAPTER XXIII

HIRAM PLAYS WALTER A SHABBY TRICK

IT was ten o'clock. Walter and Florence had the parlor to themselves at last and were enjoying that blissful solitude so dear to lovers after several hours of intercourse with friends. From the time they returned from their walk until they took Rose Jenkins home, they had not had a moment to themselves. Only a few minutes before ten they had come in and were agreeing that ten o'clock is a very early hour on Sunday evening. Their joy was short-lived. The door bell rang with a quick, business-like clang which both startled and dismayed the lovers.

Florence went to the door, and when Walter heard through the hallway the voice of the visitor, his heart fell. It was Hiram Blair. He said:

"Good evenin', Miss Bassett. Is Mr. Crane here?"

"Why, I — yes, he is here."

A SHABBY TRICK

"Tell him, please, Hiram Blair is out here an' mus' see him right away."

Florence was careful to close the parlor door as she went back before she spoke to Walter.

"Walter, Mr. Blair is at the door, and says he must see you at once. Don't let him keep you more than two minutes; I shall time you, dear."

Walter knew he could not dispose of Hiram in any such short time, but he made no reply. Going to the door, he endeavored to infuse as much cordiality into his voice as he possibly could:

"Hello, Hiram, what brings you here at this time of the night?"

"Well, Walt, ol' man, I'm mighty sorry to break up your love-makin', but we've got ter make a trip out into the country 'fore mornin', an' there's nothin' to do but start right now. I waited ez long's I could 'fore I broke in on you."

"Can't the matter wait until early in the mornin', Hi? What is it?"

"I kain't stop to tell you now, Walt, only that it is important an' can't wait; we've got ter git back afore daylight. This town'd be all up by the ears ef they seed us drivin' in after daybreak. Tell your gal good-night an' come along."

HIRAM BLAIR

Hiram Blair was one of those naturally masterful men who seem always to have their own way, and against whose wishes people do not as a rule seek to set their own convenience or comfort. Walter Crane knew that if he should call on Hiram to join him in such a trip, he would go, no matter how strong were the reasons against it. So he went back to Florence and hurriedly explained that some matters of great importance had come up suddenly, making it necessary that he and Mr. Blair should go at once to the country. Florence demurred stoutly, but Walter had given his promise to Hiram and he was not to be coaxed into breaking it.

"What is the trouble, Hiram?" Walter inquired anxiously as soon as they reached the carriage.

"Wait until we git out of New Bosting, Walt, I 'm afeered some one is listenin'."

They were well out of town before Hiram made any reference to the business which took them out, and at last Walter could restrain his curiosity no longer. He was vexed at Hiram's delay in explaining why it was necessary that he

A SHABBY TRICK

should be called away from Florence, and he impatiently demanded:

"Now, tell me, Hiram, what is this trouble. It must be serious."

Hiram whipped up the horses and gave a low chuckle.

"It's just this, Walt. I've got to drive to Morrison to ketch a train that don't stop at New Bosting an' I wuz n't goin' to drive all that trip alone with you settin' in the parlor there enjoyin' yourself."

Walter was angry through and through.

"Hiram, this is really a downright mean trick. Stop the horses or I'll jump out anyway; I'm going back."

Hiram kept the horses trotting at full speed and caught Walter by the arm.

"Walt, my boy, hev a little sense ef you air a lawyer. I'll own up it was a mean trick, an' we don't need to dispute 'bout that. But would n't you be a fine fool to jump out now and resk breakin' your neck and then race back through New Bosting an' roust all your gal's folks outen their beds an' spile her sleep jest to

HIRAM BLAIR

tell her you 'd ben flimmed by a greenhorn? You 'd make a purty sight of yourself, now would n't you? All there is for you to do is to cuss me ontill your mind 's relieved, and then set quiet here while I tell you some of the things that 's ben goin' on and you ought to know."

This did not mollify Walter's anger, but the wisdom of what Hiram had said appealed to his judgment. He realized quickly that it would not do for him ever to let Florence know he had been called away from her on such a flimsy pretext. He settled back in the seat and said not another word.

Several miles were traversed in silence. Walter knew he had been roughly treated and yet that he was not in position to get the best of the argument in upbraiding Hiram, who would treat the affair as a joke. On the other hand, Hiram felt that it was best to let Walter cool off before giving him an opening, and he did not break the silence until finally he could stand it no longer.

"Walt, you 're acquainted with Sile Carter out in Hick'ry Township, ain't you? He 's the boss of that township."

A SHABBY TRICK

"Yes, I know him when I see him; he 's strong for Houston, I hear."

"He wuz, then he wuz n't, an' now he is. Yestiddy he came to town an' went to Dave Hinckley's office. Stayed there 'bout a hour. Then he went straight over to Robinson's clothin' store, an' purty soon, by Jehoshaphat! ef he did n't come prancin' out with a bran' new suit of clothes hangin' to his ugly carkiss. Next place he went wuz to Flanagan's saloon, an' in there he busted a ten dollar bill buyin' drinks fer Ol' Dave."

"Is that the kind of a man he is?" indignantly questioned Walter.

"I don't know what kind of men do them tricks, but that's what he done."

"He ought to be strung up."

"P'r'aps so, but hangin' people ain't no fun, an' whenever I happen to hear of any one prayin' fer me, I allus hope they 'll pray that I never hev to hang a man. Besides, dead men don't vote."

"But you say he is now for Houston. How did that happen?"

"Well, Walt, it 's a right peart of a story, an'

HIRAM BLAIR

ef you 'll promise to let out a little slack in that temper of yourn, I 'll tell you."

Hiram then related how he had trapped the Hickory Township statesman and forced a confession from him that he had sold out to Hinckley. Then by threatening him with prosecution had compelled him to renew his pledge of fealty to Houston. The story was told in Hiram's best style, but it was not pleasing to Walter.

"Did n't you insist that he repay Senator Hinckley?" Walter demanded.

"Walt, do you know why a hen would n't do at all for a polytishun?"

"No, I don't and I can't see what that has to do with Silas Carter robbing Senator Hinckley with your consent and connivance."

"It is 'cause every time a hen lays a egg, she cackles so 's to let everybody know it."

Walter had been for the day under the spell of Florence's elevating influence, and his better nature was asserting itself strongly. His love for Florence had lifted him above the low level of sordid deals with men of Silas Carter's calibre, and the prospect of being obliged to mix up in such disreputable transactions was then

A SHABBY TRICK

most repugnant to him. He knew that when Florence had suggested her wish to have Hinckley defeated, she had no idea to what depths of political bartering the attempt to overcome his prestige would carry those who opposed him. Walter was absorbed in deep thought for a long time. At length he broke out with:

"Hiram, sometimes I can't help believing we are making a mistake in meeting Hinckley on his own political level, adopting the same tactics he employs and trying to defeat him at his own game when we know he is a past master in the art of tricky politics. If Sam Houston would go out before the people of this county and appeal to their sense of justice and honor, setting forth in clear and unmistakable terms the unworthiness of Hinckley as a public official, and promising to give them fair and honest representation in Congress if he is elected, I believe he could carry this primary. I cannot help having confidence enough in the people of Douglas County to believe that a majority of them are honest and that they may be reached by appealing to the better side of their natures, rather than to their sordid, selfish instincts."

HIRAM BLAIR

"That sort of talk is good fer stump speeches, Walt," Hiram replied grimly, "but it won't do in this here bizness we've got on hand. You kain't git all the hones' people on one side of any question, an' it ain't no use tryin'. Look at New Bosting. She's chuck full of religi'n, an' morals an' all that, an' ez fer honesty, I reckon the New Bosting people 'ud average 'bout fair to middlin', ez they say at the stockyards. Yit, ev'ry mother's son of 'em is goin' to vote fer Dave Hinckley. They know in their hearts he's crooked, but when he comes home from Indynapolis er Washin'ton, he pays his debts, an' that wipes out the sin. They eases their consences, my boy, by sayin' ef it wuz n't Dave it 'ud be somebody else, an' the money might jus' ez well circylate in New Bosting."

"But the rest of the county outside of New Boston —"

"These ol' fellers hez got into the habit of votin' fer Hinckley an' can't quit it even ef they tried. They won't believe the stories you tell 'em 'bout him, an' ef they did, they'd figger it out that Houston would n't do no better. It's no go, my boy. This here State hain't never

A SHABBY TRICK

goin' to be reformed by fellers that go erbout blowin' horns an' preachin' reform. The fellers that will reform her air them that keeps still 'bout it ontill they git into offis, an' then turns loose their guns on the sins an' inickities of the body polytic. When you go huntin', you don't never fire before you git in range of the game, do you?"

"No, of course not."

"Well, when a man's a candystate he's jes' flushin' the game, an' ef he goes to firin' his weepins then, he's sartin to lose. After he gits into offis, he's inside of range, an' ef he shoots fair an' straight an' brings down some game, the people know it, an' they say he's all right. The people will stan' fer a reformer who does things, but they ain't never goin' to pin their faith on a man 'cause he sez the other feller is a sinner an' he's a saint hisself."

"I suppose that's true, Hi," sadly responded Walter, "but it goes against the grain for me to have to resort to all sorts of chicanery to win a fight in the name of reform."

"You're dead right, too, Walt," Hiram answered. "It goes ag'in' the grain with me, too,

HIRAM BLAIR

jus' like it use ter go ag'in' the grain fer me to juggle round and swap off a hoss I 'd ben stuck on. But s'pose I had n't worked 'em off? 'T would n't ben long till I 'd had all the ol' spavined, good-fer-nuthin' beasts in the keounty on my hands, an' hoss buyers 'd steered ez clear of my place ez ef there 'd been a smallpox flag a flyin' in front of it. An' s'pose you 'd go back to Morrison an' say to the boys there: 'Boys, we air not goin' to use any money in this here campaign 'cause we air in fer reform, an' honesty is its own reward. We 're jes' goin' to put Sam Houston in 'cause he's the best man, an' there won't be no money fer kerridges, ner cigars, ner drinks, ner floaters, ner nuthin' on election day. You 'll hev to git out an' work 'cause we 're right, an' the other feller is wrong.' How many of your patriots would be hus'lin' on 'lection day? Only you an' three or four others. Ol' Dave 'd carry Morrison in a walk ef you 'd tell 'em that.

" 'Nuther thing, Walt, when a feller's beat in a politykil fight he allus sez he lost 'cause he made a hones' fight an' refused to spend money 'cept fer things that wuz proper. They all say that, them that did ez well ez them that did n't, an' the

A SHABBY TRICK

people don't believe any of 'em; so we won't git no credit fer being good ef we air licked, but we do git credit fer winnin', no matter how much it costs."

Walter pondered a long time over Hiram's words, which seemed to carry with them the force of irresistible logic. But he resolved in his mind that Florence should be kept in ignorance of the methods made necessary by her demand that David Hinckley be retired to private life.

CHAPTER XXIV

WALTER HAS A NARROW ESCAPE

HIRAM, the labor vote in Morrison is going to get away from us if Walter Crane does n't get down off his high horse an' do something with them." John Sharp, committeeman of one of the wards in Morrison and an effective party worker, reported to Hiram Blair one day.

"What's the matter, John? Air they gittin' hongry or thirsty?"

"Both," dryly. "You see, the labor vote here is badly mixed, mostly men without families, and they meet in the saloons to talk over everything. They get their political ideas in the saloons, and Senator Hinckley is doing some clever work along that line."

"What's the ol' rattlesnake a doin'?"

"Hinckley's fellows have told all the saloon men that if he had any friends among them, he'd treat them liberally. Then to make his word

WALTER HAS A NARROW ESCAPE

good, he has had some one spending quite a bit of money for him down at George Green's, you know where it is, near the railroad shops at the end of Smoky Row. They call it the Last Chance. Green used to live in New Boston, and so far he's the only saloon man in town that's for Hinckley. But if nothing is done for them in a few days some fellow will go over and Hinckley's men will begin spending money in his place, and before long the break will be too big to repair. I've thought of talking to Walter about it, but he is so confident these men will do what is right because it is right he cannot realize the seriousness of the situation. You can handle him, Hiram. You will have to get him to go after them. If he will just start, he will get them all right."

"No use trying to get Walter to mix up with them blood-suckers, John. He won't do it. Don't say anythin' to him 'bout it. I'll see Sam Houston and git him to send you some money to pay fer pollin' the wards, an' you git a bunch together Saturday night an' whoop it up fer Houston."

Hiram Blair's great strength in campaigning

HIRAM BLAIR

lay in his ability for concentration. He paid no attention to aught but the present necessity, completely ignoring the possibility of evil consequences in the future. No sacrifice was too great for him to accomplish his ends, and he was unwilling to concede that any sacrifice was too great for his friends. After his talk with John Sharp he made up his mind that by some hook or crook he would prevail on Walter Crane to go to George Green's and try to influence Green to desert Hinckley. He reasoned it out in his own way that if Walter could be persuaded to make an appeal to Green at the time when Houston's friends were there the enthusiasm of the moment might carry Green off his feet and he would join the Houston forces. "The best laid plans of mice and men gang aft agley."

Saturday night Hiram detained Walter in his office talking over plans for the campaign until late, then broke into their planning with:

"Walt, you air lettin' Hinckley make a bad break in your lines here, an' you 'll haf ter do suthin' to stop it."

"What 's that?" Walter was astounded.

"This here feller, George Green, thet runs the

WALTER HAS A NARROW ESCAPE

Last Chance saloon cum frum New Bosting, an' he 's fightin' hard fer Hinckley. The railroad an' fact'ry hands freq'ent his place mostly, an' he 's got a heap of follerin'. Mos' of these railroaders air what they call 'boomers,' an' they don't keer ef Senytor Hinckley steals the Washin'ton Monument — what they want is argyments they kin see an' taste."

"What do you think ought to be done?"

"Well, you an' me better go down an' see Green to-night; he knows you an' the Mayor is good friends, an' he won't dare cut up bad. You jest talk nice to him, an' I 'll see if anythin' kin be done with him. He 'll jest 'bout be closin' up now by the time we git down there; let 's go."

When John Sharp started to go the rounds of the saloons for Houston, word had come to Green that they were on the street, and he supposed they would not call on him. Being a violent partisan, he started a counter demonstration and began setting out drinks for Hinckley. Most of his customers were drinking whiskey, and Green himself had imbibed quite freely. Many of them were viciously intoxicated.

Just as Hiram and Walter reached Green's

HIRAM BLAIR

place John Sharp and his party came along, and Hiram insisted that they should all go in. Walter was surprised to see so many of his political friends in this place, but did not suspect the plot.

As they entered, Hiram took in the situation at a glance and tried to reach Walter to get him out of the saloon. But in the crowd he could not get to him until it was too late. The drunken crowd in the place had caught sight of the Houston men and the situation became intense at once. Walter's fighting spirit asserted itself and he would not retreat hastily.

John Sharp laid a bill on the bar and called out so all could hear him:

"Come up, boys, and all have a drink to our next Congressman, Sam Houston." As if that had been a signal arranged in advance, the lights went out at that instant and pandemonium broke loose. Cries of "Down with the moneybags," and "Down with the boss," mingled with the crash of furniture and glasses. Everybody was in a confused mass, struggling with whomever was nearest, not knowing whether he was fighting friend or foe. The numbers in the saloon were greater than in Walter's party and he knew they

WALTER HAS A NARROW ESCAPE

would be worsted if they made any show of fight. With the idea of getting his friends out of danger, he called out in the dark:

"Come on, Houston men, let's get out of this, we can't fight in the dark."

His voice disclosed his whereabouts to the ruffians and a rush was made for him. Walter's burly frame made it easy to distinguish him even in the darkness after he had once been located. He backed toward the door as rapidly as he could, but not soon enough. There was a dim shaft of light through the saloon which came from a street lamp on the corner shining through the curtained window. Into this shaft of light he saw a big brute come with a heavy saloon chair uplifted ready to bring it down on his head with crushing force. He kept his face toward the ruffian, but stepped backward with all possible speed.

Hiram had called to Walter to come back and supposing he would come in a moment, waited for him outside; when the lights went out he knew there was trouble and started into the saloon just as Walter had called out to his friends to leave. Hiram had some trouble getting into the place.

HIRAM BLAIR

Inside in the dim light he could just make out Walter backing toward the door with the drunken ruffian closing in on him with the chair uplifted. Hiram drew his revolver, but there were persons between him and the chair wielder so he could not fire.

So intent was Hiram on trying to get to Walter he did not look out for his own safety. One of the factory men slipped up behind him and felled him with a beer bottle just as he saw the chair fall and Walter topple over backward.

Hiram was not badly hurt, and was up in a minute. He was partly dazed and hardly knew what to do. He had lost his revolver in the *mêlée* and concluded he would have to get help before he could do anything for Walter. He went out the front door of the saloon calling for John Sharp, and the first man he met was Walter, sound and uninjured.

"Why, jiminy crickets! boy, I thought you wuz killed. How did you git out without a scratch?"

Walter laughed. "I guess Providence is on our side, Hiram. When that big brute came at me with the chair uplifted I knew he would brain

WALTER HAS A NARROW ESCAPE

me if he got me, but I suppose I was too badly frightened to know enough to turn and run. I just kept backing, and as he brought the chair down I fell backward over a beer keg, and caught the force of the blow on my feet instead of my head."

"It seems to me I heerd the feller run out yellin', 'I got the boss, I got the boss.'"

"I think he did. He supposed he had hit me with the heavy chair, and in the dark he could not see that he had not knocked me over. But you are hurt, Hiram!"

"Only a little love token on the head. It does n't amount to anything. Where 's Sharp?"

At that moment a large crowd came up headed by John Sharp and the chief of police. They were astonished and overjoyed to see both alive and unhurt.

"How in the world did you escape?" excitedly inquired Sharp. "When we heard you call out we knew they had you located, and the next thing we heard was the crash of that chair, as we supposed on your head. Then we heard that big bully cry out, 'I got the boss,' and we thought he really might have killed you."

HIRAM BLAIR

"Oh, I'm all right," Walter quickly replied. "I'll tell you about it later; but how are the others? Are any of them hurt?"

"No! not to amount to anything," coolly responded Sharp. "I got a little bruise on the side of my head and Joe Blackwell caught a chair on his arm. The doctor is patching him up. You see, it was you they were after and when you called out they all turned their attention to you. We knew we could not help you in the dark, and every fellow took your advice. I was further back in the saloon than you were, and got out a side door. Until I heard that chair crash and that bully call out that he had got you, I supposed you had managed to get out. Our fellows all scattered as soon as they got outside, and I was afraid to go back alone for you, so I ran all the way to the police station."

When the policeman and the posse arrived at Green's the place was locked up and deserted. It was never learned who it was that made the assault on Walter, so he went unpunished. Green was heavily fined, and his license revoked but he could not be convicted of any offence calling for a heavier penalty.

CHAPTER XXV

HOW THE NEWS WAS TOLD IN NEW BOSTON

THAT night before retiring Walter wrote a long letter to Florence and told her frankly what had happened. He was careful to say that no one was hurt, and did not refer to the fact that he had narrowly escaped death.

It was well for Florence that Walter's letter reached her before the rumors of the affair began to circulate in New Boston. By Monday morning the news had scattered throughout the county-seat town, gaining as it travelled. Every detail added as the story made its progress was favorable to the Hinckley side.

On Monday morning Hiram Blair called Joe Simpson into his private room, and cross-examined him:

"Joe, what air they sayin' 'bout the racket over to Morrison, Saterdag night?"

"Well, Hi, they 're sayin' a heap."

HIRAM BLAIR

"All ag'in' us fellers, ain't it?"

"Sure; 'twas n't so bad yestiddy, but this morn-in', las' time I heerd it they had it fixed up 'bout this-a-way: That you an' Walt Crane an' John Sharp an' the rest on 'em went up an' down Smoky Row an' got b'ilin' drunk, an' went inter Green's howling like Comanshy Injuns, an' swearin' you 'd run out er town every man who wudd n't vote fer Houston, an' pulled your guns an' shot the lights out an' started a reg'lar Wild West rough-house. But they say, Green an' the Hinckley fellers, bein' sober, wuz too much fer the Houston crowd an' they run 'em out, guns an' all."

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The annual reunion of the New Boston Culture Club was to be held on Thursday evening of that week and its members were as busy as they could be making preparations for it. This made frequent meetings necessary, and all the young ladies were much together. Florence had succeeded in her plan to have one of the other girls invite Rose Jenkins' brother. Rose had reluctantly sent an invitation to George Robinson, who was the most eligible candidate for this favor although

HOW THE NEWS WAS TOLD

a strong partisan of Hinckley. While the other girls were looking forward to the evening with high hopes, Rose secretly dreaded it, fearing that Mr. Robinson would spoil her evening by doing something to show his prejudice against Walter Crane, and knowing that she would have but little chance for companionship with her friends.

Rose's fears were not shared by Florence. She was happy because she felt this arrangement would give her Walter all to herself. She felt a touch of pride in having defied the usages of the Club and in the belief that she was entirely justified in having done so. She knew she could have done nothing which would shock her girl friends more, but she felt that it was the most natural thing in the world to do, and she experienced unconsciously a kind of self-elation in the knowledge that she had sufficient courage to do what she felt was the right thing, despite the indignation it aroused among her most intimate friends.

Monday afternoon Florence and Rose were in the public square and met Rachel Strong, one of the Culture Club girls, with whom they at once entered into a spirited conversation over the many

HIRAM BLAIR

little details of the arrangements for the reunion. Presently Ruth and Mamie Hinckley joined the party. The small talk had not proceeded far when Mamie, trying to appear entirely innocent, suddenly broke in with:

"Oh, girls! have you heard about that horrible affair Saturday night over at Morrison? It was perfectly awful."

Rachel Strong had not heard. She became interested at once, and excitedly inquired what it was.

"Why, I have n't heard all the particulars, but it was an awful fight started by some men over there who are against papa, and they were drinking liquor Mr. Houston paid for, and they became so intoxicated they went up and down the street firing their revolvers and threatening to drive any one out of Morrison who would vote for papa. It was perfectly dreadful, and I'm so glad papa can win without having to ask those rough people over there for their votes."

Florence's face paled at the first mention of the disturbance, and as Mamie told the story she flushed with anger, but managed to control herself by an effort and inquired quietly:

HOW THE NEWS WAS TOLD

"Was any one hurt, Mamie?"

"I 'm not sure, but I heard one man had his skull crushed and another one his arm broken. The ruffians went into Mr. Green's place, and fired at the lights and when the room was perfectly dark they broke up the furniture and assaulted everybody who did not run away. Mr. Green is a friend of papa's and they had been threatening to mob him if he did n't turn over, but they did n't do any harm until they drank so much that their vicious natures overcame their cowardice."

Rose was all excitement and could not control her curiosity. Florence had not mentioned the affair to her, and she had not heard of it before. She burst out with:

"Why, that Mr. Green used to live here, did n't he? He kept a saloon, a low place. Perhaps he was the one who started the trouble. Who were the others?"

Ruth Hinckley took up the answer, fearing that her younger sister might have gotten into deep water. "Mr. Green may not be a perfect gentleman, Rose, dear, but in this case the story is quite clear that the others were the aggressors,

HIRAM BLAIR

and just to think! They were headed by one or two of the most prominent men in Morrison — lawyers and business men. It's terrible to think what ruin whiskey will work on young men, especially in such a wicked city as Morrison, where there are no elevating influences. It is so dangerous for young men who are away from home to live in a city where the surroundings are so conducive to evil habits, and especially so when they undertake to get into politics. The temptations are so great, my papa says, only men of the strongest character are able to stand out against them."

"My dear Ruth," interposed Florence, having by a strong effort of the will, regained an outward appearance of composure, though she was boiling inside, "I would not be surprised to learn that your version of the story is very highly colored. I know nearly everything we hear in New Boston about Morrison becomes scandal before it has travelled far. Everybody here is so friendly to your father they are likely to put his Morrison friends in the best possible light."

"Oh, no, Florence, I can't be mistaken," quickly replied Ruth. "A gentleman who was

HOW THE NEWS WAS TOLD

there and saw it all told papa this morning, and I happened to hear it. Then you know, my dear, it is really a fact that those Morrison people are mostly railroad men and mill hands, who are coarse and ignorant. It is not at all surprising that this dreadful thing happened. It's a wonder there is n't more trouble. When men get excited in a campaign and politicians will buy liquor for them and make them drunk as these Houston men are doing, they are so apt to do vicious things. It disgusts me with politics, and if I did not know how much my papa detests such things I would not want him ever to be a candidate for office again. Papa is strongly against using liquor in politics and never indulges in it himself."

At that moment the distinguished form of Congressman David Hinckley turned the corner and bore down upon the bevy of girls. They did not see him, and he did not notice them until he was within a few feet of them; then he stopped, undecided whether to go on or turn back. Just then one or two of the girls turned and observed him. This decided him, and he came on. The Congressman had been in Flanagan's with a

HIRAM BLAIR

party of friends, and was going to his office to rest up. His face was flushed and his step was unsteady. As he passed the girls he straightened up. With an effusive smile and an unusual flourish of his hat as he lifted it, he said:

"Good afternoon, ladies."

Then he caught an awning post to steady himself as he stepped off the walk to cross the street, and passed on to his office.

Not a word was spoken. Ruth and Mamie Hinckley had turned as pale as death when their father passed them. Florence could not help sympathizing with them in their great distress; the blow had fallen so suddenly and at such a miserably unfortunate time. Grasping Rose by the arm, and without looking at the Hinckley girls, she hurriedly gasped:

"Rose, come on; we must be going. Good-bye, girls."

When they were out of sight of the others, Rose turned to Florence with:

"Florence, dear, I feel all in a tremble, don't you? I feel just like I think I would if I saw a man stab another in the back."

CHAPTER XXVI

SQUIRE WATKINS GIVES A WARNING

WALTER was in his office Monday morning working like a beaver. His political work had caused him to neglect his professional duties woefully, and he was trying to make up for lost time by getting the most out of every minute. His inner office was littered with open law books while he himself was so engrossed he did not notice that an individual had entered his office until his visitor startled him with:

“Good mornin’, Walter, you seem to be mighty busy.”

“Why, hello, Squire. Yes, I am busy. Did you want to see me?”

Squire Ebenezer Watkins was one of those characters known to every city, who had early in his life determined to get through this world just as easily as he could. When he was young he had conceived the idea that lawyers earn their

HIRAM BLAIR

living easier than any other class of men. He went into a lawyer's office to learn to be a lawyer but soon found he would be obliged to obtain a better general education, and then only by diligent study and application could he gain sufficient knowledge to pass an examination for admission to the bar. Upon making this discovery he straightway abandoned his intention of becoming a lawyer, but became all the more devoted to his original idea of living off his wits without work. He hung around the justice's offices, did odd jobs of collecting, discussed every lawsuit with the loafers on the streets and after a few years convinced himself he knew as much law as most of the lawyers. Then he began running for Justice of the Peace every time there was an election. By dint of perseverance in this effort he had, after several unsuccessful attempts, managed to get on the ticket when there was no other candidate. Having slipped into office this way he made himself useful to that numerous class who cling steadfastly to the belief that laws are made for others than themselves. This class became his loyal supporters, and he had been continued in office several terms.

WATKINS GIVES A WARNING

The Squire's connection with the courts led him to believe his presence was necessary in New Boston a large part of the time when court was in session. He found his greatest pleasure in listening to the trial of cases and afterwards explaining to the crowds which always hang around the country court-houses, wherein the lawyers had made mistakes in examining witnesses or arguing their cases. He had an ambition to be County Judge, which ambition was frowned upon by the Democrats of Morrison, but secretly encouraged by the Hinckley crowd, as they knew he was a thorn in the flesh of the decent element in Morrison. Walter Crane's persistent refusal to recognize the Squire's hints that he might enter upon a broader field of political usefulness rankled in his heart, and he was really for Hinckley though professing openly to be for Houston. When Walter asked somewhat curtly what his business was, he ignored the business-like tone of Walter's voice and sat down after taking off the chair an open book Walter had not offered to remove.

"Yes, Walter, I did want to talk with you a few minutes if you have time." He spoke insinuatingly.

HIRAM BLAIR

"Well, Squire, I have an appointment at eleven and all this work to do, but I'll give you a few minutes. What is it?"

"That was bad business Sat'day night, Walter, an' I'm afeerd it's goin' to hurt Sam a heap. Seems like the people out in the county air gittin' a diffrent idee of it from what I heerd was the case. They're awful riled up in New Bosting. I jist come frum there this mornin'; you know I've got a darter livin' there an' I have to look after her a right smart."

"Now, see here, Squire," Walter petulantly interrupted, "I have n't time this morning to take up politics; I don't care what the New Boston people are saying about Saturday night's affair, and I cannot take time to listen to it."

"But, Walter, you know I'm your friend, an' want to help you. What they're sayin' 'bout the trouble Sat'day night ain't all of it. That ain't what I come to talk about. I come to warn you about somethin' else."

"Why, Squire, what's the trouble now?"

"Well, it 'pears like there's to be some kind of a sassiety fixin' over there Thursday night, that

WATKINS GIVES A WARNING

the rule is only New Bosting boys hez a right to go to, an' they 've heerd you air goin', an' they 're turbly mad 'bout that, too."

"What is that their business, Squire?"

"Oh, I don't know, I don't go in fer sassiety and I ain't up on the rules. When it comes to court proceedin's, I 'm right to hum, but I ain't in it on sassiety. I 'm only tellin' you they 're sayin' it won't be good fer you to come up to that fandango Thursday night, an' I kinder thought I oughter warn you not to go. I don't want to see any of my friends git inter trouble, an' if I wuz you I 'd shore stay away from New Bosting fer a spell, specially at night, an' frum this sassiety doin's in pertickler."

"Tell me, Squire, just what they told you they are going to do."

"Why—um—you see it wuz just a sorter rumblin' thet I heerd. Course they would n't tell me much, 'cause they know I 'm your friend, but I 'd ketch a word dropped onct in a while that put me on they wuz organizin' to do you some harm ef you broke that ol' established rule they hev. You know New Bosting people 's awfully sot on

HIRAM BLAIR

anteek things. An' so I jest come over to warn you an' to advise you to fool 'em by sendin' 'em word you 've got a *ex post facto* engagement an' stay to hum that night."

Without speaking a word Walter turned to his papers and began reading, neither looking up nor paying attention to Squire Watkins in any way. Presently he pulled a pad toward him and went to writing rapidly. After standing this a few minutes the Squire got up and walked to the door. As he took hold of the knob Walter looked up.

"Squire," he said, "are you going to New Boston again this week?"

"Not that I know of, Walter." The Squire made it a rule never to resent a snub, because by resenting he would admit that he had been snubbed; so he answered Walter in a conciliatory manner. "Did you want me to look after some-thin' fer you?"

"O! it does n't matter if you are not going. But if you do go, I wish you would please tell your friends over there that on next Thursday evening I shall drive into New Boston as near six o'clock as I can make it; that I will eat supper at the hotel, and go to the Culture Club reunion

WATKINS GIVES A WARNING

later; and that I will leave New Boston for Morrison about midnight or as soon as the reunion is at an end. You might also tell them that if they know of any law against my going, they may get out an injunction, but if they don't, I 'll be there. Now, good morning, Squire."

CHAPTER XXVII

THE BANNER TELLS THE STORY

WALTER was only fifteen minutes behind the time he promised Squire Watkins he would arrive in New Boston the evening of the Culture Club reunion. He drove through the quiet streets of the village without appearing to notice that there was anything unusual in the way the people on the square stared at him, but he was conscious of the fact that his appearance was creating a mild sensation. He drove around to Hiram Blair's stable, where he put up his horse without calling any one. He noticed that Hiram's team was not in the stable, and concluded he was not in town, so Walter went into the house and direct to the room he usually occupied in his visits to Hiram. As he drove into the stable yard he had seen Mrs. Blair engaged about her household duties, and had spoken to her, but remembering that on his last visit to the Sheriff's house the children were down with

THE BANNER TELLS THE STORY

the measles, he did not attempt to see any of the members of the family. Having removed the dust of travel from his clothes, he went at once to the hotel for supper where he again noticed that he was the object of more than the usual attention.

The reason for this soon became apparent. As he turned from the hotel register his glance fell on the table where the day's papers were lying, and he beheld the issue of the *New Boston Weekly Banner* of that day. On its first page under bold and startling headlines was an article which explained it all. His name was in black face type in the heading, and he was not spared in the body of the article. It was a description of the fight at George Green's, written in that lurid style country editors affect when they are writing down one man to build up another.

The entire article was made up from the false and slanderous rumors that had been bandied about in New Boston for the week, and in every line was condemnation of Walter and the Houston men, while Green and the Morrison supporters of Hinckley were lauded as heroes of the highest type.

CHAPTER

THE BANNER

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THE BANNER TELLS THE STORY

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The reason for this was behind her back and sneering: he turned from his sweetheart of Walter Crane, the on the table with a? It is too much. Oh, what devil and he kind of soul-racking injuries are wrought *Weekly Banner* part of politics!"

under his arm pressed hurriedly and hastened to the which explained the. Florence was not yet down when face type of town into the parlor, and he knew she in the bringing unusual pains with her toilet. At the light of the came and her appearance justified the style of her or she was radiantly beautiful, and attending down a costume which while becomingly modest. He used off her charms to the best advantage. and never was not given to the small talk of so-phists, but he involuntarily exclaimed:

"F goodness, Florence, you do look splendid to-

ice took a chance on the disarrangement
diffure and rewarded his compliment.

HIRAM BLAIR

Walter sat down and read the article through. At first he became thoroughly angry, and the impulse rose within him to go out and thrash the editor. Then there came to him a vision of the frail, consumptive looking editor attacked by a young man, standing six feet in his stockings and weighing a hundred and ninety. That would never do, especially in the midst of a campaign. He considered, too, that the editor was not so much to blame for the article as Hinckley, who had coerced him into publishing it. For a time his anger gave way to a sort of amusement at the wanton effrontery of the writer in departing so far from the truth as to make himself the laughing stock of intelligent persons by the ridiculous impossibilities that were seriously recited as facts.

This mood did not last long. Another thought came to Walter with the force of a thunderbolt. It caused him to crush the paper in his clenched fist and grit his teeth in anger. Rising quickly he strode into the dining-room, ordered a hasty supper, made a pretence of eating, then hurried back to Hiram's house, where he bolted into his room and closed the door. Then he began to talk aloud to himself in this wise:

THE BANNER TELLS THE STORY

"You fool, to be thinking only of yourself when this lying newspaper and the slanders of New Boston are causing the dearest girl in the world untold agony! How can she bear to come out and face the people of this town where she has lived all her life when she knows they will be pointing at her behind her back and sneering: 'There is the sweetheart of Walter Crane, the Morrison bully'? It is too much. Oh, what devilish tricks and soul-racking injuries are wrought in the noble art of politics!"

Walter dressed hurriedly and hastened to the Bassett home. Florence was not yet down when he was shown into the parlor, and he knew she was taking unusual pains with her toilet. At length she came and her appearance justified the delay, for she was radiantly beautiful, and attired in a costume which while becomingly modest showed off her charms to the best advantage. Walter was not given to the small talk of society, but he involuntarily exclaimed:

"Goodness, Florence, you do look splendid to-night."

Florence took a chance on the disarrangement of her coiffure and rewarded his compliment.

HIRAM BLAIR

"Florence, I want to say something at once," Walter burst out, unable to restrain himself. "I've just read the *Banner* and it has made me feel that perhaps it is asking too much of you to take me with you to this affair to-night. Every one there will have read this slanderous article, and it will be embarrassing to you, so much so it will spoil your evening. I don't wish to cause you any discomfort, and can see how hard it will be for you to take me in the face of this cruel slander."

Florence looked at him searchingly a few seconds, then inquired earnestly, "It is n't the least bit true, is it, Walter?"

"Why no, darling, of course not. It is all false, basely and villainously false."

"Then, sweetheart, who is there that should resent it and repel it so much as I, your affianced wife? Come, it is time to go."

"You are as brave as you are beautiful, Florence, God bless you," joyously exclaimed Walter, and again Florence's coiffure stood in danger of disarrangement.

Walter's reception at the Culture Club was not unlike his expectation. He was greeted with

THE BANNER TELLS THE STORY

formal courtesy by Miss Strong, the hostess of the evening, and by such others as he happened to be acquainted with, but a studied effort was apparent to ignore his presence, especially among the young men, who not only looked down upon him as a Morrison man, consequently of low degree, but also as an interloper enjoying a privilege which should have been bestowed upon some New Boston gentleman.

As Walter passed through the rooms with Florence on his arm he noticed all this, and notwithstanding it made him feel slightly uncomfortable to read the savage thoughts concealed beneath the calm exterior of those who tried to look politely unconcerned, yet he experienced a kind of grim satisfaction in the knowledge that the favor of the most charming and beautiful of New Boston's young ladies was the cause of all this hatred. Florence acted as if she was wholly unconscious of this undercurrent of hate. She laughed and talked with those whom they passed and with Walter, never indicating in the slightest that there was anything unusual in the situation. Occasionally she would introduce Walter to some one he did not know and when the person

HIRAM BLAIR

introduced would hasten away as soon as politeness would permit, she would smilingly resume the small talk with which she and Walter were beguiling the time.

Presently Miss Strong called Florence away to assist her in preparing one of the games and Walter was left to his own resources. He moved toward a quiet corner where he watched the lively crowd and rather enjoyed observing how much persistence they displayed in ignoring him. This was not for long, however. Ruth Hinckley, accompanied by young Ralph Thompson, who was her faithful admirer, strolled by in a few minutes and with assumed inadvertence came full upon Walter. He had met Miss Hinckley before, and spoke courteously, expecting them to pass on, but not so.

"Ah, Mr. Crane, so you are here? It is so kind of a Morrison gentleman to signally favor our poor little city. Do you not feel that you are condescending quite a little?"

"On the contrary, Miss Hinckley," Walter replied, suavely, "I esteem it a very great honor to be permitted to join such a charming social circle. I have never yet had the pleasure of knowing

THE BANNER TELLS THE STORY

what it is to condescend; one must ascend before he may condescend, and unfortunately for me, I have never ascended socially."

"But your city is so full of life. You do have social gatherings of this sort in Morrison, do you not?" Miss Hinckley was loftily polite. "I really know so very little of Morrison."

"It is somewhat difficult, I'll confess, to learn much of Morrison living in New Boston; yes, we have some social functions there that are very pleasant."

"Did n't you have a social affair over there Saturday night, Mr. Crane, that was somewhat exciting, or was that nothing unusual in Morrison?"

There was the slightest twitch in one of Walter's eyebrows as he answered this question.

"Yes, there was an innovation introduced in a gathering Saturday night by a former citizen of New Boston, that was not only exciting but quite unusual. But I've heard that this party intends returning to New Boston, and we are hoping there will be no recurrences of this sort of excitement in Morrison."

"You speak as if you regard the people of

HIRAM BLAIR

Morrison as superior to those of New Boston. Do you really think so?"

"Not in the least, Miss Hinckley; in fact, the New Boston people are immeasurably superior to Morrison people in one of the arts, at least."

"And what is that, pray?"

"In the art of producing fiction."

"Perhaps, Mr. Crane, you may be prejudiced in favor of fiction, preferring it to commonplace facts and that inclines you to credit others with imaginations they do not possess."

"You flatter me, Miss Hinckley, but you are mistaken. I've spent too much of my time reading prosy law books to become very deeply attached to fiction, or to be a good critic. Yet, I am sure the editor of the *Banner* has an imagination little short of marvellous; he is indeed a genius."

"Is that so? Really, I must take to reading the *Banner* more regularly. It must be a great newspaper when one from such a lively city as Morrison can find in it anything to commend. By the way, Mr. Crane, I've heard you are making political speeches now. Have you taken up the farmers' movement?"

THE BANNER TELLS THE STORY.

"No, not exactly; I am talking straight Democracy and reform in the public service. Do you take an interest in politics?"

"Yes, some; but I can't understand much about it. Do you prefer politics to the law as a profession?"

"Ah, Miss Hinckley, that is an odd question. I've never looked upon politics as a profession, but as a public duty in which all men should take their fair share —"

"But is not this Mr. Houston whom you are talking for a very wealthy man? Do you mean to say you can afford to talk for him without fee when he is not able to talk for himself? Is n't that what lawyers get paid for — saying things for men they can't say for themselves?"

"Politics and law are quite different, Miss Hinckley. The lawyer serves only his client, but in politics it is the whole people one is serving. The duty is broader and requires more unselfish devotion to the right. Every man ought to take an interest in politics, especially the more intelligent and the more honest. Do you not think that we may help in a small way to bear the burdens of upholding the government which belongs to us

HIRAM BLAIR

all without neglecting or abandoning the profession we have chosen as our life work?"

Ruth Hinckley was clearly getting uncomfortable. The advantage she expected the situation to give her seemed to have disappeared in some mysterious way, and she was as anxious to close the interview as she had been to start it. The smiles under cover of which she had been sending her poisoned arrows were harder and harder to feign. She could no longer keep up the play of ignoring Walter's opposition to her father as of no consequence either to him or her, and she burst out with:

"Do you mean to say you think it is a public duty to try to defeat a man so distinguished and who has done so much for his State and his county as my father, and put in his place an ignorant farmer whom everybody knows is not fit for a Congressman?"

"Miss Hinckley, I beg your pardon," Walter replied gravely and courteously, "I am sorry to be obliged to say that I never discuss either my cases or my political differences with the wives or daughters of gentlemen to whom I am thrown into opposition."

THE BANNER TELLS THE STORY

As Walter turned away he came upon Rose Jenkins who stood behind him, a gleam of satisfaction shining in her eyes. She was cordial enough in her greeting to compensate for the coldness of the rest of the company, and at once took possession of Walter, saying ecstatically, "Oh, Mr. Crane, I've heard it all, and I'm so glad you gave Ruth such a turning down. It was just lovely. Come, let us go out on the veranda where we can talk. Florence is as busy as she can be, and they will not let her get away so long as they can find anything for her to do. I've sent Mr. Robinson away so I could help entertain you and we must make the most of our time. Let us go outside."

They found a quiet nook on the veranda where they were out of hearing of the company, and Walter heaved a sigh of relief.

"Miss Jenkins," he murmured gleefully, "since Florence left me, I've travelled the hot sands of the desert of unfriendliness; but you have brought me to an oasis. I shall remember you in my will."

"Please, Mr. Crane," rejoined Rose, "do not call me 'Miss Jenkins'; I hear Florence talk about

HIRAM BLAIR

you so much I feel as if I knew you intimately, and it seems to take you so far away to hear you call me by my formal name. Florence always calls me 'Rose,' and in her name I give you the same privilege."

"Rose, then you shall be — a white Rose, signifying friendship, loyalty, and purity; also a Rose among thorns, for it was there I was most fortunate in discovering you to-night."

"I don't wonder Florence loves you, Mr. Crane, if you say such nice things to her. And you must, for she is the dearest, sweetest girl of all. She is as loyal and devoted to you as can be, and she does n't care one bit what the people in this mean old town think. She knows you are right and that she loves you. Why, this afternoon when she read that horrid *Banner* she came and got me, and we walked around the streets downtown as long as we could just to let people know we were not to be cowed or frightened by such falsehoods. Oh, I could n't have done it if it had not been for Florence. She is so strong and independent, I almost feel brave myself when I am with her. You ought to be the proudest and happiest man on earth, Mr.—"

THE BANNER TELLS THE STORY

"The name that Florence calls me by is Walter," gravely suggested he.

"Walter, then, you must excuse me for talking to you all the time about Florence, but I know that is what you want to hear, and I must tell you something more. Florence is having a great deal to worry her at home. You know Mrs. Bassett is threatened with nervous prostration, and Florence is obliged to bear a world of responsibility she has not been accustomed to in the past."

"I did not know that." Walter's tone was distressed. "She has not said anything to me of that. I knew some time ago there was some trouble, but supposed it had passed over."

"It has not. Florence is so strong-willed and determined she insists on working out all these problems for herself, and will not allow any of her friends to share her troubles. She knows you have so much on your mind with your campaign and business, she is determined not to tell you her troubles. You must not let her know I told you. If you do she will scold me, and I would n't have that happen for anything."

"How, then, can I be of help to her if you will

HIRAM BLAIR

not allow me to speak to her of her cares? It seems to me, Rose, you are suggesting an unwise course."

"Oh, no, you must not say a word to Florence unless she brings up the subject. She knows what is best and if she thinks you can help her and makes up her mind to call on you she will. Florence is one of those individuals who are so independent, sincere and — and — there's another word —"

"Intense," supplied Walter.

"Yes, that's it; she would stand up for you now if she knew every other person in New Boston would cut her acquaintance. Then she would shut herself up at home and be happy in the thought that she had done what she believed to be right for one who deserved it."

"You seem to know Florence quite well," Walter thoughtfully replied.

"It's because I love her so. I never could get any insight into the character of others. But you will have to do your share, Walter. Florence will make any sacrifice for you, but she will expect as much of you. If you had failed to come here to-night, I believe she would have nearly lost

THE BANNER TELLS THE STORY

her respect for you. She would not have lost her love, for no true woman can do that, but I am convinced it would be almost impossible for Florence to marry the man she loved if she could not respect and look up to him. So you see what a high standard I am setting for you, Walter. Florence has such a noble and lofty character herself that the man to whom she looks up must be near perfection."

"Judging from current reports in New Boston I imagine such a man would be hard to find in Morrison," responded Walter, with an attempt at gayety. They heard a light step behind them, and a low laugh interrupted their *tête-à-tête*.

"So here you are, enjoying yourselves like two young doves," Florence gayly exclaimed, "when I was worrying myself almost frantic because I supposed you both were having the dullest time of your lives. Aren't you ashamed of yourselves, having such a good time when everybody here is just dying to see you in misery? What is it you politicians say about '*pro bono publico*'? You certainly are defying the injunction to sacrifice yourselves for the good of the public. If you young folks wish this affair to be a success, and

HIRAM BLAIR

have the *Banner* tell the truth, when it says next week, 'every one present enjoyed the occasion to the utmost,' you should go into the parlor at once separately and look as miserable as you can."

"I am disposed to think the editor of the *Banner* will not be greatly troubled if he should fail to tell the truth," rejoined Walter, "at least it does not strike me it is my duty to discommode myself on his account. Since you are here I am wholly oblivious to the fact that there are any other people on the premises."

"Oh, Florence, you must thank me," Rose put in, "I rescued Walter from the dragon."

"Yes, I heard about it, honey, and ever since I've been wandering frantically about the place looking to see if you had n't taken him entirely out of harm's way. You know how jealous I am of you."

"Girls, I suppose we must go back into the refrigerator again," Walter ventured reluctantly; "I'm entirely thawed out now."

CHAPTER XXVIII

WALTER REFUSES SOME GOOD ADVICE

HIRAM BLAIR had returned from his trip before Walter reached the Sheriff's home that night, and was sitting up waiting for him. After greeting him in his usual boisterous manner, Hiram gazed at him oddly for a moment, then said:

"Ben runnin' the gantlet to-night, eh, boy?"

"Yes, Hiram, I suppose that is as good a name for it as could be found. The only real fun I've had to-night was when I could get away by myself and think about how hard you tried to break into New Boston society. Some people are always hunting for trouble while others have it thrust upon them. But what have you been doing since you came home?"

"Oh, I've ben havin' a good time, too; I've ben readin' the *Banner*."

"They tell a pretty strong story, but I believe it's so far from the truth it will react against them

HIRAM BLAIR

before the campaign is over. Don't you think so, Hi?"

"I ain't much of a literary cuss, Walt; that's your department, but I guess you're right."

"At all events, we can't help what they say. We're in for it now, and must see it through. I must get my horse and go. It's after midnight."

"Look here, Walt," Hiram earnestly interposed, "either you stay here all night an' go home in the mornin', or I'm goin' with you. These fellers is awful hot at you, an' there ain't no tellin' what they'll do. I don't really think their nerve is ekal to their mad, but they've ben readin' the *Banner* all day, an' drinkin' Dave Hinckley's whiskey, an' it's foolish to take chances."

"Hiram, don't you see that I can't do that?" remonstrated Walter; "if I do either of the things you want me to do they will give it out that I am scared and they will never let me have any peace. The only way for a man to have peace when he is among enemies is to make them think he wants to fight. If I show the white feather at this stage of the game it will be impossible to keep these fellows off my track in the future. I'm

[232]

WALTER REFUSES SOME ADVICE

greatly obliged to you, Hiram, but I must go home to-night by myself, just as I said I would."

"That is foolhardy an' senseless. Walt, you air too valyble to us in this fight to be out huntin' fer a oppertunity to git done up. You've ben readin' in the magyzines 'bout the brave soldiers who git out in the rain of the enemy's bullets an' dodges all of 'em an' comes home an' runs fer offis; but them's jest stories. The reely brave an' sensible officer is the feller that never gits inter danger ontill he jest kain't git outen its way. I don't keer a cuss what the story books sez, Walt, the dead and wounded ain't no good in either war er polyticks."

"I've thought all this over, Hiram, old man, and have made up my mind finally that I must do just what I started out to do. Perhaps it was foolish for me to say what I did, but I've said it, and cannot get the words back. No one will molest me, I am quite sure, but they will be watching me to see how I leave New Boston, and they would ridicule us both if you should have your way. I know you are right from your standpoint of an officer of the law, but I also know I'm right from my standpoint."

HIRAM BLAIR

Seeing that it was futile to argue longer, Hiram impatiently muttered, "Well, then, go ahead; but have you got a revolver?"

"No, I never carry weapons of any kind, I have always been afraid I might use them if I had them."

"That 's right, too. You don't need a revolver. Take this club. It 's good an' stout an' jest the right length fer use in a buggy. We keep it roun' ez a sorter short-cut argyment to use with prisoners thet is bull-headed like you air to-night. If they come at you, crack ez many of 'em over the head ez you kin with this. It 'll put 'em outer bizness fer a spell; an' ef they give you a chance, git away ez quick ez you kin. An' so long's you 're fool enuff to try to make 'em b'leeve you ain't skairt, don't git skairt."

CHAPTER XXIX

THE ATTACK IN THE NIGHT

WALTER was addicted to the habit of talking aloud to himself when alone, and as soon as he was clear of the streets of New Boston he began to soliloquize:

"Only six weeks since I took this drive after promising Florence to try to defeat Hinckley! How little one can foresee what troubles will be raised when he gets into politics. Here I am, a lover of peace and quiet, abhorring rough and uncouth associations, yet I am thrown headlong into broils and fights, even being charged with responsibility for them. I am forced to associate on a common level with men whose habits and character are repugnant to me, and to countenance, yes, even to encourage political methods of which I am thoroughly ashamed. Yet I am convinced that the end I seek is a pure and worthy one. It is certain that to permit Hinckley to go

HIRAM BLAIR

back to Congress would be an injury to the State, the county, and the Democratic party. His vote and influence are invariably on the side of those corporate interests which employ corrupt means to secure legislation."

The instinct of the lawyer came to the front then, and Walter took up the cross-examination of himself:

"Yes, old man, that all sounds nice, but did you think about all these things before Florence asked you to take up this fight against Hinckley? Were you not willing that Hinckley should go on with his corrupt methods without even a protest from you until a demand was made upon you which arose from jealousy and spite? Is it not a fact that your motives in this matter are really narrow and mean instead of pure and patriotic? Don't you think, honest now, that you deserve all the trouble you are having?"

That was a poser. The cross-examining lawyer was getting the better of the character witness, but the witness rallied again.

"When a man's trying to do a good work it is never fair to question his motives too closely. Most of the reform work of the world would fail

THE ATTACK IN THE NIGHT

if there was not a selfish motive somewhere to supply the power. I'm no better than the average man but I'm convinced, Mr. Lawyer, that I'd never have allowed myself to be persuaded to go into this fight against Hinckley if I had not believed he was dishonest."

The cross-examiner was not to be squelched so easily. "But your methods, my boy. Would you not have been doing your duty to Florence and to the State if you had pursued strictly legitimate methods? Must you be crooked because other men are? If you could not defeat Hinckley by straightforward politics, did you promise Florence you would stoop to disreputable acts to gain success?"

"If we should pursue a high-toned and strictly moral campaign," again the character witness made an effort, "he would win without a struggle. These men who eleven months out of the year are clamoring for political reform are now clamoring for money to carry their townships with, and if they do not get it they will throw their support to Hinckley. Oh, Mr. Lawyer, you know very well that reform must masquerade as a practical politician before the

HIRAM BLAIR

election, or it will never break into the halls of legislation."

"Halt, you Morrison upstart!"

Walter's soliloquy was rudely disturbed as he turned a corner into a dark, low place in the road just south of the bridge over Sand Creek two miles out of New Boston. Simultaneously with this command two figures jumped at the horse's head from each side of the road and though Walter gave the animal a sharp cut with the whip they stopped him.

Several other men rushed to the buggy from each side, attempting to get inside the wheels and drag Walter out. He was prepared for them and the first two that came up on either side received a heavy blow from Hiram Blair's club which sent them groaning to the ground.

The attacking party was too many for Walter, however. The next thing he knew he was caught from behind and dragged bodily backward over the back of the buggy seat. Despite his struggles and the vicious blows he struck at his assailants he was dumped headlong on the ground. In his fall his left arm was caught under his body, and a sharp twang of pain warned him that it had

THE ATTACK IN THE NIGHT

been broken. He turned so as to protect the broken arm and leave his right arm free. With the club still in his hand he fought off those in front of him until one slipped up behind and caught his free arm in a vise-like grip, and another wrenched the club out of his hand, leaving him at their mercy. Blows were rained on him by all at once. The pain of his broken arm weakened him and it was not long until, despite his great physical strength, he was down and out. As he lay helpless the ruffians belabored him with vicious kicks until he was unconscious.

One of the fellows who had been knocked down in the attack on the buggy came up at this point. He had possessed himself of the club that had been thrown down by the one who had taken it away from Walter and rushed forward with this heavy club uplifted intending to crush the skull of their helpless and unconscious victim.

The blow did not fall. As he came in range and was about to swing the weapon with death-dealing force, he was caught under the chin by a well-directed blow which sent him sprawling into the hedge at the side of the road, and the others were knocked right and left by fast flying blows

HIRAM BLAIR

from the fists of Hiram Blair and Joe Simpson. When the New Boston fellows were well scattered, Hiram sang out:

"In the name of the State of Indiany, I command the peace."

There was no need for that. Hiram and Joe were giants in strength. They had caught the mob entirely unaware and their blows were so well distributed that the New Boston men were either lying helpless by the roadside or fleeing like mad into the darkness.

"Joe, you take your dark lantern," growled Hiram, "an' see who these fiends of darkness is, while I look after Walt. Just take their names. We'll tend to their cases to-morrer. Soon's you've done thet, ketch Walt's hoss an' we'll go back to town."

By this time Hiram was down on the ground examining Walter's prostrate form. He soon discovered the broken arm, and in turning him over so as to take the weight of his body off the injured member he succeeded in arousing Walter to consciousness.

"Well, my boy, they got you, hey! Air you much hurt?"

THE ATTACK IN THE NIGHT

"Not much, Hiram, only my left arm seems to be broken. They dragged me out over the back of the buggy and I fell on it."

Hiram helped Walter to arise and take an inventory of his injuries. It was found that fortunately the darkness had prevented his assailants from judging their blows well, and aside from several bad bruises his only serious hurt was the broken arm.

By this time Joe had returned with Walter's horse and buggy. When Hiram and Joe had appeared on the scene the boys holding the horse had turned him loose and scampered down the road. He had gone only a short distance as he seemed to realize he would soon be needed, and Joe caught him easily.

The young fellow who received the full force of Hiram's first blow was still lying unconscious in the hedge. He had suffered a broken nose when Walter struck him in the dark with his club, and when he was thrown into the hedge by the impact with Hiram's powerful fist, he lay there limp and helpless. He was found to be John Davidson, a son of one of the Democratic business men of New Boston, and one of the

HIRAM BLAIR

young men who had failed to receive an invitation to the Culture Club reunion. His father was a strong partisan of Hinckley, and he had heard a continual round of abuse of Hinckley's enemies at his father's store. Davidson was a leader of the gang that had waylaid Walter. He was taken into the buggy with Hiram while Joe rode back to New Boston with Walter.

Friday morning about eight o'clock John Sharp was walking down to his harness shop in Morrison and ran into Hiram Blair rushing up street like mad, looking thoroughly disgusted with himself and everybody else. Sharp was surprised to see Hiram in town so early in the morning, and greeted him with:

"Hello, Sheriff, what are you doing here this time of the day? Where are you going?"

"Howdy, John," Hiram puffed as he slowed up, "I 'm tryin' to ketch the train fer New Bosting an' I 'm on the goldarndest fool experdishun ever ez smart a man ez me got mixed up in. Come on over to the deepo with me an' I 'll tell you about it."

Sharp turned and went with Hiram who talked rapidly as they walked.

THE ATTACK IN THE NIGHT

"You know, John, Walt Crane hed ter go to some kind of a sassiety fixin' in New Bosting last night. Well, they mobbed him on the road two miles out er town ez he wuz comin' back —"

"Mobbed him! Who? Is he much hurt?"

"Don't stop me, my train 's whistlin' now. In the scrimmage he got his arm broke. Joe an' me follered him, smellin' trouble, an' got there jist in time to keep them from killin' him. His arm wuz n't bad broke, only one of the wrist bones, mebbe Walt kin tell you the name the doctor called it, but I kain't. So when it wuz patched up an' the bones set an' the weatherboardin' on, Walt he ups an' sez he 's goin' home. It wuz three o'clock in the mornin', mind you, an' him ben pounded all over by a dozen hoodlums fer all of five minits, besides havin' his arm broke. Listen to reason? Not on your life. He jest stood up there an' backed me an' Joe an' the doctor down an' vowed he'd walk home ef we did n't hitch up an' let him drive. An' I b'leeve, by jiminy crickets, he 'd 'a' done it. So I jest had ter drive down here with him. Got him home an' in bed 'bout a hour ago. Asleep when I left him. Sez he 's got ter git out by ten, 'cause he 's

HIRAM BLAIR

got a case in the Justice Court — some scalawag he's tryin' to keep out er jail, to beat me out of feedin' him, I reckon. Don't s'pose there's any fee in it, or he cud hev telephoned down fer some other lawyer to take keer of it.— Well, John, here's my train. Go an' see him 'bout half past nine. Things lookin' fine fer Houston all over the keounty, Good-bye."

John Sharp walked away, muttering.

"So Walter's got his arm broke and bruised all up. He seems to have his lightning rod up for trouble all the time, and yet he's as peaceable a young man as I know. He's game, though, and he won't quit until he can't wiggle any longer."

At half after nine he walked over to Walter's boarding house where he was met by Mrs. Dougherty, whose honest Irish blood was all afire with indignation and with alarm for Walter.

"Coom right in, Misther Sharp. You're coom to see Misther Crane, I'm sure, an' it's right welcome you aare. He's in his room, an' I do be afeerd he's afther gitten oop to go to his offis, an' him with a broke aarm, an' all bruised up besides. The dirty blackguards! I

THE ATTACK IN THE NIGHT

wisht I had them where I could git at them, I 'd show 'em. I 'll show you to his room, an' do you kape him there ontill he 's well an' hearty agen. He kapes tellin' me he needs nothin' done fer him, an' yet he knows I 'd do annythin' fer 'im, fer he 's a foine young gentleman, is Mither Crane, barring he wurruks too harrd, an' stays out too late nights with them nasty polyticks, an' me a-worritin' in fear of his health breakin' down, an' when I talks to 'im about it, he only smiles at me wid that beautiful smile of his an' sez, 'Don't worry, Mrs. Dougherty, I 'm all right.' Here 's his room, Mither Sharp; go right in."

Walter was struggling into his clothes as Sharp entered, but not making very rapid progress.

"Good morning, John, glad to see you," he cordially exclaimed looking out through the neck of his shirt; "it 's kind of you to come so soon. You can help me on with these clothes. You 've heard about my little experience, have you?"

"Yes; I happened to meet Hiram as he was going to the train, and he told me about it. I 'd have come over sooner but he said you were to sleep until half past nine," responded Sharp as he busied himself helping Walter into his clothes.

HIRAM BLAIR

"I'm glad Hiram told you, as it saves me the trouble and I'm in an awful hurry. Let's go out to breakfast and I can talk to you as I eat. Mrs. Dougherty, God bless her, has been wanting to bring my breakfast in to me for half an hour but I would n't permit it."

"What is the business so important that you must get out this morning?" inquired Sharp.

"Oh, it's not so important. It's only a case in the Police Court. You know Billy McGee, son of the Widow McGee? He got into a disturbance of some kind at Johnson's saloon the other night when he was under the influence. The other parties were saloon loafers that infest Johnson's place, and Billy was drawn into a quarrel that resulted, as usual, in a general fight. In the *mêlée* a beer bottle was thrown through a mirror. Now Johnson is trying to get Billy fined for assault and battery and to prove that he was the aggressor, so he can force him to pay for the mirror. The other fellows are not worth anything, but Billy works and supports his mother and is a good boy except that he has a lonesome life and occasionally livens it up by an excursion over into the bad lands. As he can't

THE ATTACK IN THE NIGHT

afford to pay for the mirror, I'm going to try to make out a plain case of disturbance of the peace, let him be fined for that and then I think I can prevail on Mayor Hopkins to remit the fine. They can't prove that he threw the bottle. He declares he did n't, and unless they can prove that he started the trouble, Johnson can't get a judgment against him for damages."

"I did n't suppose the McGees had any money to employ a lawyer."

"Now, John, look here." Walter turned around earnestly. "You know that if old lady McGee came to you in trouble you would n't stop to ask her whether she had any money. Let's not talk about that any more. I want to ask you to do something for me; but wait a minute — Oh, Mrs. Dougherty!"

Mrs. Dougherty had gone out into the kitchen wiping her eyes as Walter was telling of the Widow McGee's troubles, but she came back hastily.

"What is it, Mither Crane?"

"I wish you would send Patsy down to Squire Thompson's office to give him a note from me; I'll write it by the time he comes in."

[247]

HIRAM BLAIR

Walter hastily scribbled a note to the justice saying he would be at his court a few minutes late and handed it to Patsy, who came in beaming with pleasure, glad to be of service to Walter, whom he looked upon this day as a great hero.

"Now, John, let's talk fast. Have the boys all been notified about to-night's committee meeting?"

"Yes, they'll all be on hand. They're getting worked up to the right pitch."

"That's good; tell them I'll be there and will want to arrange for a vigorous campaign from here out. The poll lists are coming along all right, are they?"

"Oh, yes, we're getting a complete poll."

"Keep after all the boys, John, and see to it that they realize the importance of getting every vote for Houston in Morrison we possibly can. This is a fight of Morrison against the New Boston boss system, and if we win this fight, others will come much easier. If we nominate Houston it will put Morrison on the map politically. Now come along, John, we must be going. Billy McGee's mother must not pay for that mirror."

CHAPTER XXX

BILLY MCGEE IS CLEARED

IT was with some difficulty that Walter made his way to the Justice Court, he was stopped so frequently by friends inquiring solicitously about his accident; but at length he reached the temple of justice and found all the parties waiting for him. Billy McGee's bleak face lighted up with confidence as Walter entered, but darkened as he saw Riley Johnson, the saloon-keeper, draw Walter into a corner for a hurried conversation.

"Say, Walter, I 've ben wantin' to see you. You ain't gettin' no fee out of this, are you?"

Walter placed his hand on Johnson's shoulder and looking him squarely in the eyes, replied: "Riley, that is a matter between my client and myself. The arrangement is entirely satisfactory to me, and I trust it is to him."

"Oh, well, I — I know, Walter," confusedly returned Johnson; "of course that 's none of my

HIRAM BLAIR

business, but you know I'm your friend and expect to help you boys out in the primary, and don't think you ought to be fightin' me here, unless you just have to, that's all. It won't hurt Billy to plead guilty to this here charge of assault and battery. He can be ketched fer disturbance of the peace, anyways, an' there ain't much difference in the fines. More than that, you can get the Mayor to remit the fine. I don't care for that; what I want to do is to keep up the reputation of my place, an' let these rowdies know they can't get drunk at other places an' come in an' break up my fixtures without bein' punished."

"Have you entered complaint against the others who were in the fight?"

"Why, no; they would n't of done no harm if Billy had let them alone."

"Well, Riley, I must get into the case. I'm a lawyer to-day representing my client, my duty is to him; when I get back into politics I'll talk to you about the primaries."

Walter Crane did his duty to his client so well that the jury brought in a verdict of "not guilty" without leaving their seats, and Riley Johnson was ashamed to make out a new complaint for

BILLY MCGEE IS CLEARED

disturbance of the peace as he had threatened. After the jury had given its verdict Walter turned to Johnson and said in his gentle, persuasive way: "Riley, I'm worn out completely. Will you go and get a carriage to take me to my boarding house?" And Riley Johnson took him to his home and helped him to his room.

The meeting at Shields was considered the most important of the campaign. Shields was midway between Morrison and New Boston and was not certain in its allegiance to either the county-seat or the metropolis. A special effort had been made to rally the Houston forces for this meeting and to try to swing the influence of Shields away from Hinckley.

Walter was the last speaker. He had drifted into place as the most popular of the speakers and made his speech last so as to hold the crowd for the other speakers and send the people home in good spirits. Sam Houston himself spoke a few words, then a talk was given by Frank Perdue, a young lawyer from Columbus Junction, who had been added to the list of Houston speakers because Hiram said he controlled some votes in his township and that was the cheapest way

HIRAM BLAIR

to get his influence. George Jenkins took up the greater part of the time, as it was understood Walter would speak only a few minutes. He had kept close to his room after returning there at the close of the trial, except for the committee meeting the night previous. He was so weak and sore Saturday it was well-nigh impossible for him to leave his room. Hiram went to Morrison and helped him to dress and get into the carriage. Then he found him a comfortable seat on the platform where he could rest until his time came to talk. As he left Walter to look after working up the enthusiasm of the meeting, Hiram said:

“Now, Walt, don’t try to talk more’n fifteen minits, an’ go fer Ol’ Dave jest ez hard ez you kin. Put plenty of fire into your speech an’ make it mighty short.”

If Walter had been able to follow Hiram’s sage advice, all would have been well, but in the excitement of the moment and his earnestness in the cause, he forgot his weakness and the pains which racked his body. The crowd was carried away with his eloquence and he himself was carried away with the cordial response his hearers

BILLY McGEE IS CLEARED

made to the points of his speech. He prolonged his address to a full half hour, and was giving no indication of closing when Hiram came up behind and whispered, "Cut it, Walt, you'll kill yourself."

Brought back to earth, Walter at once launched into his brilliant closing peroration, an appeal for public honesty and high-minded patriotism. In the midst of one of his most telling periods he dropped headlong on the platform, completely exhausted. The men on the platform rushed to him, and dashed water in his face, thinking he had fainted, he was lying so pale and still. It was Hiram, though, who met the emergency. He had stepped down off the platform when Walter started to close, and was on his way to get the carriage and drive it up to the platform, when he heard Walter fall. He rushed to the platform, crowded through the helpless men surrounding him, and shouted:

"Get out of the way, men, and let me git to him! He's faint from pain. What he needs is whiskey."

He lifted Walter's head upon his knee and producing a full flask from his pocket, he gave the

HIRAM BLAIR

sufferer a copious draught from it. In a few minutes Walter was able to be assisted to a chair, but wholly unable to finish his speech.

George Jenkins dismissed the meeting and gave the people assurance that Walter's attack was not serious, and that he would be himself again within a few days.

CHAPTER XXXI

TROUBLES BEGIN TO MULTIPLY

FLORENCE BASSETT received on Friday a brief note from Walter written before he left New Boston after his broken arm was set. In it he wrote that he had been attacked on his way home and had sustained a slight fracture of the forearm, which would inconvenience him a short time, but had suffered no serious injuries. He had said he would be obliged to rest on Sunday and therefore must forego his usual Sunday visit.

Florence at once wrote him a long letter, expressing the deepest sympathy for him and concern for his safety. She was extremely bitter against the miscreants who had attacked him, but not more so than against herself for having induced him to engage in this political warfare, which she had come to abhor with all the strength of her virile and positive nature. She begged

HIRAM BLAIR

Walter to forgive her for bringing all this trouble and turmoil upon him just to satisfy a girlish whim of which she was then most thoroughly ashamed, but declared that while she pleaded for his forgiveness, she could never forgive herself for her folly.

She insisted that Walter must write to her by every mail telling her how he was doing, and begged him not to leave his bed until he was entirely well. When this letter was finished Florence went over to Rose Jenkins' and found relief in taking a good cry in Rose's arms.

Much of the trouble that fills this world is caused by little things; trifling errors, seemingly unimportant of themselves, but when taken in connection with circumstances apart become of the greatest moment. When the mail came Saturday morning Mrs. Dougherty knocked gently at Walter's door, but he did not answer. Thinking that he was asleep and feeling that it would be a sin to disturb him the good woman left the letters to be given to him when he came out to dinner. Along in the forenoon Hiram called to see Walter, and to his question if he was in, Mrs. Dougherty replied:

[256]

TROUBLES BEGIN TO MULTIPLY

"Yes, Misther Sheriff, he 's by his room, but the puir boy 's asleep, God bless 'im."

"Is he, Mrs. Dougherty?" briskly responded Hiram. "That 's good, but I 've never yit seed a man so sound asleep he could n't wake up when his country called him; I 'll go in an' see him."

"Well, then, Misther Blair, if you will go in, please be koind enough to take these letters to him; he 'll be afther wantin' wan o' them, oim shure."

"All right, Mrs. Dougherty, I 'll give them to him."

Hiram put the letters into his pocket intending to give them to Walter after he was through talking with him, but not before. He declared it always gave him the fidgets to have a man opening letters and reading them while he was talking to him, so he placed the letters securely away in his pocket, and thought no more of them until the next day when Walter telegraphed him for them. On Sunday morning Walter had anxiously inquired of Mrs. Dougherty for his Saturday mail, which had not made its appearance, and she told him she had sent the letters to him by Hiram. Not getting a letter from Florence

HIRAM BLAIR

either Saturday or Sunday, Walter did not write to her until Sunday afternoon. This letter did not reach her until late in the day Monday, and it was written before he had actually read her letter, which was still in the custody of the Sheriff. His letter was naturally disappointing, as he felt ashamed to acknowledge to Florence the mishap which had befallen her letter, and tried to write as if he had received it.

Florence was not without information of Walter's trouble Saturday night at Shields though she did not get his letter until later. Early Monday morning the Bassett home was favored with a visit from Mrs. Melinda Cornstubble, the village gossip. She began an incessant stream of talk as soon as she landed on the threshold.

"Good morning, Mrs. Bassett and Florence, too; how are you both this morning? I heard, Mrs. Bassett, that you are not feeling well, and I ran over to see how you are getting along just as soon as I could get through my morning work. I'm not feeling extra fine myself, but I'm so sympathetic when any of my neighbors are in trouble, I never think of my own trials when other people have theirs, but try to do all I can to help

TROUBLES BEGIN TO MULTIPLY

them. It would break me all up I know; but people are so different nowadays, leastwise —”

“I don’t understand you, Mrs. Cornstubble,” Mrs. Bassett interrupted coldly, “pray tell us what you mean.”

“Oh! I know it is n’t *exactly* as if it was in the family, of course, but everybody is taking on precisely as if it was; and it’s almost as hard to bear up under, I can imagine. Of course I suppose it is all off now, and Goodness knows it’s a blessing you’ve found it out before it was everlastingly too late. It’s the same old story. My pa always told me never to place any dependence on anybody that came from Morrison, and it’s true to this day. They do say this Mr. Crane has n’t been there so long, but he’s imbibed the germs of iniquity even in the short time he’s lived there, and just to think; he’s duped and deceived one of the finest girls in New Boston! It just sets me afire with indignation.”

Mrs. Bassett was still cold, but her interest was clearly aroused. “I’m sure I do not follow you, Mrs. Cornstubble. Mr. Crane has been here at the house several times, that’s true, but I do not understand what you mean.”

HIRAM BLAIR

"Is it possible, Mrs. Bassett, that you have been kept in ignorance of all the disgraceful goings on since the reception Thursday night? Why, Florence, you —"

But Florence had left the room unobserved either by her mother or the visitor.

"Oh, well! perhaps it is better for Florence to be gone," Mrs. Cornstubble resumed. "I do hate to carry tales and if I'd known you had n't heard I'd never let a hint of it fall from my lips; but so long as I've said so much I really can't stop now. A gossiping tale-bearer, one of the kind that's always trying to stir up trouble between people I just despise and for my part I never repeat the ugly stories I hear about people; but all the town knows this except you, and the sooner you hear it the better. It's so much easier to hear bad news from a sympathizing friend than from one of these tale-bearing gossips. It's about like this, and I'm sure I've got the straight of it, for I've heard it ever so many times and always the same way:

"Thursday night after the party at Strong's this Mr. Crane goes to Blair's and he and that old heathen, Hiram Blair, he's from Morrison

TROUBLES BEGIN TO MULTIPLY

too, sits up drinking whiskey and planning deviltry for two mortal hours. Then young Crane starts for Morrison in his buggy, beastly drunk and whipping his poor horse most unmercifully. About two miles out of town he met some young men of New Boston coming home from a party they had been attending in the country. They did n't see him in the dark until he was right on them, but they were making enough noise so he could hear them and he drove his horse at a full gallop right into the crowd and knocked young John Davidson senseless and hurt some of the others. Crane was so drunk himself that he fell out of the buggy and broke his arm. The boys did n't know who it was and did n't know his arm was broken, and they were so mad at him for running into them, that they jumped on him and pounded him good. Then Hiram Blair who suspected that Crane was too drunk to get home safely, and followed him, came up just when Crane was lying there helpless and he hit some of the boys so hard they've been in bed ever since.

"And that is n't all, Mrs. Bassett; much as I hate to tell bad news, I'd not be doing my

HIRAM BLAIR

Christian duty if I let you be ignorant of what everybody else knows all around you and it concerning you more than anybody else. Those Morrison toughs had a meeting over at Shields last Saturday night and whiskey and beer flowed just like water. It was positively disgraceful and this same Crane with his broken arm staring him in the face as a warning for him to reform, went from dive to dive, setting out the drinks and encouraging the poor wretches to drink, and he drank with them, until when it came his time to speak and he got up on the platform, he was so drunk he had to hold on to a post and he had n't been talking more than fifteen minutes when he fell all in a heap on the platform, dead drunk. It's perfectly shocking and I'm dreadfully sorry for you and Florence having this disgrace hanging over you. It's such a shame you and Colonel Bassett did n't refuse to ever let him darken your doors on general principles. That's what I'd have done if it had been me. But that can't be helped now. What's done's done. The only thing now is to get out of it the easiest way. Just to think! After all Florence has done for him, letting him come here right along, taking

TROUBLES BEGIN TO MULTIPLY

him up in good society, even to the Culture Club reunion, then for him to disgrace her in this abandoned way! He ought to be mobbed, and there's talk among the men. They are awfully bitter, but none of them blames you, Mrs. Bassett. Of course, they know you'll never let the scoundrel darken your doors again."

Mrs. Bassett was deeply shocked and mortified at the story Mrs. Cornstubble told. She knew the woman was a long-tongued gossip and that she had exaggerated the story, but she felt sure it was founded on the actual rumors that were afloat in New Boston. She felt that the fair name of the Bassett family had been subjected to gross injury, and she held Walter Crane responsible for that injury. Her innate dignity and pride prevented her from giving Mrs. Cornstubble the satisfaction of witnessing a display of her feelings, so that she might go out in town and tell all who would listen that "Mrs. Bassett took on dreadful." So she said in a quiet, even tone when Mrs. Cornstubble had finished:

"Mrs. Cornstubble, I'm glad you called and I appreciate your kindness, but as you know I'm not at all strong these days, and if you will

HIRAM BLAIR

excuse me I'll go now and lie down. The doctor says I must put in a great deal of my time in a room entirely dark and quiet, so as to secure complete rest. So I must bid you good morning."

Mrs. Cornstubble was given no alternative but to leave. She went out to hunt some willing ears to listen to her story of "how Mrs. Bassett and Florence took it."

CHAPTER XXXII

REVEREND MR. BILLINGS ENTERS THE STRUGGLE

REVEREND ALEXANDER BILLINGS was the most popular minister of New Boston. His church was of the Christian denomination, and included within its membership the society leaders and prominent business men of the city. The families of Congressman Hinckley and of Colonel Bassett both worshipped under the ministrations of the Reverend Mr. Billings. David Hinckley was the most prominent member of this church and accordingly the minister was an ardent admirer and loyal supporter of the Congressman.

On this Monday afternoon as the minister emerged from Congressman Hinckley's private office his face bore an expression of earnest enthusiasm and grave determination. He turned his steps briskly toward that portion of the city where Colonel Bassett lived, and within a few minutes he was being received by Mrs. Bassett,

HIRAM BLAIR

pale and agitated, but hopeful that the visit of her pastor would aid them in finding a way out of their trouble. The minister lost little time in getting to the subject which was on his mind.

"Mrs. Bassett, I desire to speak with you and Miss Florence together; will you please ask her to come in?"

"I fear, Mr. Billings, that Florence cannot come in to-day. She is suffering with a severe headache, and is in her room. She has asked not to be disturbed."

"Mrs. Bassett," suavely but insistently the minister spoke, "I am exceedingly sorry to disturb Miss Florence when she is ill, but the matters of which I wish to speak are of the gravest importance, particularly to her, and the most serious consequences might result from delay. I feel it to be my duty as your pastor to insist that if Miss Florence is at all able to appear she should permit me to speak to her."

Thus urged, nothing was left for Mrs. Bassett to do but to go to Florence's room and try to persuade her to see Mr. Billings. Florence's first impulse was to refuse point blank to come down, but her mother appeared to be so greatly

BILLINGS ENTERS THE STRUGGLE

distressed at the thought of undertaking the interview alone that she relented.

"Tell him, that I will be down presently," she wearily said, and turned to make herself presentable.

"Good afternoon, Mr. Billings; I am glad to see you, though this miserable headache makes it difficult for me to be courteous! You wished to talk with me?" Florence dropped languidly on a couch as she spoke.

"Yes, my dear Miss Bassett," responded the clergyman, "my duty to you as your pastor makes it incumbent on me to speak to you as I would to one of my own children, and I can truly say it is with deepest regret that I find myself obliged to speak of matters which may be exceedingly disagreeable. It is only the obligation which rests upon me to care for this flock God has committed to my care that brings me to you to-day. It is a bitter cup and I would fain put it aside, but I must not shirk the duty He has laid upon me."

"Please proceed, Mr. Billings," Florence interrupted, somewhat coldly, "I have but little strength and must soon return to my room."

HIRAM BLAIR

"Then, begging your pardon for my directness of speech, I will say that I have come to speak to you of the young gentleman from Morrison, Mr. Crane, who has been a frequent visitor here, and is received by you to the exclusion of other gentlemen. It is understood in New Boston that he has been accepted by you as a suitor and that your plans contemplate calling upon me to act in my ministerial capacity at some time in the future. Far be it from me to do the young man injustice, for I only know him from having seen him occasionally as he has accompanied you to church. He must be a gentleman of character and intelligence or he would not have found favor in the Bassett home where I am well assured only pure motives and high aspirations are permitted to dwell."

"Thank you, Mr. Billings," interjected Mrs. Bassett, but Florence remained silent.

"However much may have been said in Mr. Crane's favor at the time he came into your acquaintance, I am compelled to say that within the past few weeks since engaging in this political campaign, he has wandered far away from the paths of morality and right living. He has

BILLINGS ENTERS THE STRUGGLE

formed dissolute, immoral, and disreputable associates with whom he mingles on a plane of equality. It is with this character of men that they hope to encompass the defeat of that Christian gentleman and patriotic statesman, our honored fellow citizen, Congressman Hinckley."

Florence turned her face to the wall as if to conceal its sudden pallor from the minister, and sighed in pain, but spoke no word.

Mr. Billings went on after a brief pause. "Finding it necessary to enlist in their cause the off-scourings of society, these men who are striving to elect Mr. Houston are using, so I am informed, whiskey and money without limit, and are placing temptation before men and youths to corrupt them and ruin their lives. While placing the tempter before others Mr. Crane has himself fallen into its snares. He is, I am compelled to say, on the most unquestioned authority, one of those unfortunates who when one taste of liquor passes their lips, become thoroughly aflame with the desire for drink and are wholly unable to control the demoniacal spirit which fires their blood with the all-conquering demand for alcohol. These poor unfortunates, marked

HIRAM BLAIR

from birth, often men of otherwise high character, are slaves to alcohol, and once within its thrallment they drink until they are crazed, and commit acts of violence entirely foreign to their natures when free from the influence of the drink."

"Oh, how dreadful!" Mrs. Bassett again interrupted, but Florence gave no sign of interest except that when the minister made a direct charge against Walter, she turned and gazed fixedly into his eyes as if searching earnestly for signs of sincerity.

"It was this most distressing weakness," proceeded Mr. Billings, "which caused the disgraceful occurrence of last Thursday night. When Mr. Crane left you, Miss Bassett, he went direct to the home of Sheriff Blair, where they drank until he left for Morrison. Some distance out of town he came upon a party of New Boston young men. They were returning from a social gathering in the country and were talking in tones loud enough to be heard for quite a distance down the road. As it was dark and they were engaged in spirited conversation they did not notice the horse and buggy coming toward

BILLINGS ENTERS THE STRUGGLE

them. In one of those frenzies which so often attack these unfortunates Mr. Crane whipped up his horse when within a few feet of the party and ran into them at full speed. Mr. John Davidson, one of our best young men, was knocked senseless and struck by the hoof of the horse, breaking his nose. The horse stopped suddenly, being a gentle animal, and in his helpless condition Mr. Crane was thrown violently out of the buggy. His forearm was broken in the fall, but the night being dark the New Boston young gentlemen did not discover this, and they administered punishment to the offender, for which they are heartily sorry now that they realize the conditions. They were chastising him when the Sheriff and his deputy came up. These men knowing the condition Mr. Crane was in, had followed him, and came up too late to see what had actually happened, but in time to see the castigation the young men were giving him in their indignation at his unwarranted assault on them. The Sheriff drove the boys away and brought both Mr. Davidson and Mr. Crane to New Boston where their injuries were attended to by Dr. Morton."

HIRAM BLAIR

Florence at last broke the silence.

"You say, Mr. Billings, that these boys were returning from a social gathering in the country. Would you mind telling me where it was?"

"Why — ah — really, my dear Miss Bassett, I did not inquire, but you certainly are not going to doubt the veracity of all these young men."

"Will you not kindly inquire where it was, just to satisfy my curiosity, and when you learn the name of the family, let me know? It is quite unusual for any other social function to happen in or near New Boston on the night of the Culture Club reunion. You say, too, that Mr. Crane was intoxicated when he met these young men. How do you know that to be true?"

"He undoubtedly was, Miss Bassett. There was a bottle of whiskey, nearly empty, found lying by the roadside Friday morning at the place where the encounter took place. It was, so I am informed, the identical brand of liquor kept in the home of the Sheriff at all times."

"At what time did you hear the meeting took place?" Florence persisted in her cross-examination.

"At about one o'clock, Miss Bassett."

BILLINGS ENTERS THE STRUGGLE

"But that can hardly be true. It was exactly twelve when the Culture Club dispersed. It was fully twelve-thirty when Mr. Crane left me, and it certainly would have been impossible for him to have gotten into the condition you describe in the short time that elapsed between our parting and his encounter with the young men. As to the bottle, it must be a brand which has a very limited sale if Mr. Blair buys all that is sold in New Boston."

"My dear Miss Bassett," responded the minister in a conciliatory tone, "I can understand fully why you seek for excuses, and sympathize deeply with you. I, too, would be glad, yes, thrice glad, if it were possible to wipe out these ugly circumstances with excuses or explanations. But after all is said the ugly circumstances remain, and the future confronts us with all the dangers that these circumstances imply. Nothing would please me more than to be able to say conscientiously that you might gratify your present inclinations and at the same time assure yourself of future happiness. But though the task set me is hard, my duty is clear. You must know the truth. I have not told all. On Saturday

HIRAM BLAIR

night the Houston forces engaged in a most disgraceful orgy at Shields. Unheeding of the warning of Thursday night, Mr. Crane was there with his arm in a sling. A citizen of New Boston whose word is absolutely unquestionable told me this morning that he saw Mr. Crane leading crowd after crowd of rough men and boys into the dens of iniquity which are licensed to deal out poison to men. This gentleman told me that he took it upon himself to inquire of men whom he saw coming out of these places if the young Morrison lawyer was drinking with them, and they replied, of course he was. When he undertook to speak he was able to talk but a few minutes before his libations overcame him and he fell prostrate on the platform. The meeting was broken up and Mr. Crane was taken to his home in Morrison helplessly intoxicated.

"It grieves me most bitterly, Miss Florence, to be obliged to say unpleasant things to you who have been one of my most beloved and valued followers. But a young lady of such splendid character, such admirable traits, such high intelligence, and superb accomplishments cannot, nay, must not yoke herself with a man who will drag

BILLINGS ENTERS THE STRUGGLE

her down from the lofty heights. The time has come, the crucial moment in your life, when you must decide whether you will travel the high road or the low road. Mr. Crane may be possessed of all the attributes of a high-minded gentleman; I cannot say that he may be worthy of you, for I am unable to bring myself to think that; but he may possibly be able to make you a good husband provided he will devote himself rigorously to an abstemious life and totally abjure the degrading and demoralizing influence of politics. Unless he will promise to do so, and unless he fulfils that promise for a fixed period, your duty to yourself, to your loving mother, to the church, and to the community demands that you renounce this gentleman forever. I cannot say more, but let us kneel and look to Him who takes note of the sparrow's fall for guidance in this hour of our great trouble, when we are so much in need of the strength and wisdom which can alone be gained by a firm reliance on the all-wise and omnipotent Creator."

And the Reverend Alexander Billings knelt and lifted his voice to Almighty God in the presence of two pure and holy Christian women

HIRAM BLAIR

when he knew in his heart he had basely maligned a brother man, that he was maliciously driving the iron of despair into the heart of a noble girl, and that when he raised his voice in prayer he was a hypocrite and a foul blasphemer.

CHAPTER XXXIII

FLORENCE FINDS HERSELF IN DEEP WATERS

WHEN they arose Florence sadly held out her hand to the minister and in sorrowful tones, yet with a defiance in her eyes which looked straight into his, she said:

“Mr. Billings, for the interest you have taken as my pastor in my affairs, I thank you; now I must beg of you to excuse me, as I must retire to my room.”

It was long before she could bring herself to think with any degree of calmness of the terrible dilemma which confronted her. Fierce indignation at the charges made against Walter, which her heart told her were false, strove for mastery over her determination to save him from being further subjected to cruel persecution and slander in a campaign he had undertaken to gratify a foolish request she had made. Even though she had believed every word the minister spoke,

HIRAM BLAIR

she could see no blame for Walter, but felt herself to be alone culpable. She reasoned it out with herself that even his enemies admitted he was worthy and of correct habits until he had engaged in the political quarrel his love for her had drawn him into. It was into a dangerous, one-sided position this course of reasoning led this noble-hearted, unselfish but headstrong girl. Her own responsibility for this trouble was the one idea which filled her mind to the exclusion of all others. She was drawn irresistibly to the conclusion that it was her duty, at whatever cost, to save Walter from his enemies, from himself if need be. Her own future dwelt upon so earnestly by the minister, entered not the slightest into her thoughts. Realizing that Walter had undertaken the campaign because of his love for her, Florence believed so strongly in that love she felt she could call him out of the campaign with no more trouble than she had persuaded him into it. In fancy, she put herself in his place, and imagined him coming to her with tears in his eyes imploring her to save herself and lift the pall of a blighting responsibility off his heart; she found a keen satisfaction in picturing to herself

FLORENCE IN DEEP WATERS

the happiness it would give her to grant his request no matter what it might be; the greater the sacrifice the greater her happiness in making it for him. In Florence's thoughts on this solemn day, reason lagged along clinging to the hand of love, and when love reached its goal, reason also stopped.

The cunningly contrived fiction of the minister that Walter was marked by heredity with an abnormal and irresistible craving for drink had a peculiar effect on Florence. Whether the minister knew the tender subject he was touching upon, or had accidentally happened to strike it, cannot be discovered, but in either case he had unlocked the door of one of the sacredly guarded closets of the Bassett family and shaken up the dry bones of the skeleton hidden within its dark walls. A brother of Mrs. Bassett, George McIntosh, had been so marked, and his wretched career was a subject the Bassetts often grieved over but never mentioned even to one another.

George McIntosh as a boy was precocious, industrious, and obedient to his parents; withal he was a manly boy, a natural leader among his fellows. He graduated from the high school in his

HIRAM BLAIR

home town at the head of his class and entered one of the leading universities where he soon became one of the most popular students. He possessed that peculiar broadness of mind and disposition which enabled him to be popular both with the faculty and with his brother students. Active in many athletic sports, he never appeared to neglect his studies. He was of a generous, open-hearted disposition and so frequently assisted his less favored classmates in various lines of effort that he was dubbed "The Good Samaritan" and this nickname clung to him all through his college life.

A few days before commencement day when George McIntosh was to graduate, again at the head of his class, the seniors gave a stag party attended only by the class. It was to be the last celebration before the seniors scattered to their homes and took up their various avocations and it was agreed that the supper should be one long to be remembered. Up to that night McIntosh, while easily the most popular senior, had refrained from joining the other young men in their late suppers on the plea that he did n't have time for banquets and headaches. He had never

FLORENCE IN DEEP WATERS

tasted liquor, not from any prejudice against it, but because he had not found time to join in the dissipations of college life. At this time, his work being over, he threw off the restraint and drank freely of the wine that was generously served. He had no fear of more serious consequences than a severe headache the following day, which all the seniors expected.

As the hours wore on the fun became fast and furious. Good-natured jibes were bandied back and forth with the freedom and recklessness of wine-inspired college boys. At the height of the festivities McIntosh's best friend, sitting opposite him at the table, rose to his feet and gravely announced:

"Now, gentlemen, we will all sing that popular song, 'Will the College Close, When the Good Samaritan Goes?' "

This was a harmless college joke, the couplet having been originated and sung by the juniors who took delight in taunting the seniors with their dependence on McIntosh to pull them through not only in athletics but in class work as well. At times the juniors would repeat this so often it would exasperate McIntosh by its

HIRAM BLAIR

monotony, but he had always taken it good-naturedly. This night as it was suddenly sprung upon him it struck his wine-crazed brain at a tangent and he jumped to his feet exclaiming, "You are insulting me!" and threw a heavy decanter full into the face of his friend. The force of the unexpected blow knocked him backward over his chair, his face cruelly cut and bruised.

The next morning when George McIntosh awoke he knew nothing whatever of this occurrence and would not believe it until he was taken to his friend's room and saw him lying there with his nose broken, his face a mass of bandages. Then he broke down and cried like a child. He nursed his friend night and day, and vowed repeatedly that he would never touch another drop of liquor.

The affair was hushed up and McIntosh allowed to graduate, but he refused to act as valedictorian and spent the night of the commencement at the bedside of his stricken friend. It was the old, old story. He kept his pledge for nearly three years, then in a moment of weakness, convinced that he had outlived it, took one drink and went on a prolonged spree. From

FLORENCE IN DEEP WATERS

that time on his life was made up of periods of misery and periods of hope. In one period of long-continued soberness he married a sweet little woman. Again the tempter came and again he fell, and so it went, down, down, down, until the once proud and masterful George McIntosh at last died a wreck, his own life ruined and bringing ruin to others. Yet he was loved to the last by those to whom he brought greatest sorrow. This story of George McIntosh came up before Florence as she considered her course. She could remember her uncle as a young man — a splendid specimen of physical and mental power, superior, magnetic, invincible. It came to her in a flash that she had seen in Walter a counterpart of her beloved Uncle George in his days of strength. She shuddered at the horror of it all and resolutely put the picture out of her mind.

While she labored with herself in the solitude of her room, Walter's letter came. It was not such a letter as she had hoped for. It seemed constrained and unresponsive to the sympathetic letter she had written him, which had not found its way to Walter's hands until that morning,

HIRAM BLAIR

hours after the letter she was reading had been written. Walter mentioned the meeting at Shields but did not say a word about his fall. His neglect to mention this alarmed Florence as he had hastened to inform her of any trouble he had up to that time. Instead of lifting her out of the slough of despair, as she had hoped when she fondly clasped the letter to her bosom, she felt herself sinking deeper as she divined, with a woman's keen intuition, the effort to conceal from her things she wanted to know.

What a blunderer man can be! If Walter had frankly confessed to Florence that while he was lying sick in his room Hiram had carried his letter away and never thought of it until he was asked for it, how much easier it would have been! But Walter, loyal to Hiram always, did not care to confess to his sweetheart his friend's carelessness, lest she should become more prejudiced against him. So Florence did not know what the matter was, but she knew in her heart there was something concealed in the letter, and she felt that the blood was oozing out of her heart, leaving it dry and lifeless.

With the letter in her hand Florence threw

FLORENCE IN DEEP WATERS

herself upon the bed and poured out her sorrows in a flood of tears upon the sympathetic pillows. There she remained for hours. Her travail over, her heart filled with a determination that framed itself into words as she arose and went to her writing desk.

"I must save him. I must save him at any sacrifice."

CHAPTER XXXIV

THE TEMPTER APPEARS

WALTER was in his office early Monday morning, feeling refreshed by the long rest he took over Sunday. When he went home from Shields Saturday night he found Mrs. Dougherty sitting up waiting for him. The good old soul was so fearful that harm might come to him she could not sleep until she saw him safely home and out of danger. He asked her not to allow him to be disturbed on any account, and she obeyed him scrupulously. Thus he was able to rest thoroughly. His fractured wrist was healing rapidly and he felt equal to the hard week's work before him. The forenoon he devoted to office work and right busy did it keep him.

Just before he was ready to close his office and start home for dinner, Mayor Hopkins came in with a stranger. The stranger was a tall, fine looking, self-possessed gentleman, middle aged,

THE TEMPTER APPEARS

and with the air of a city professional man. Walter greeted his visitors cordially.

"Hello, Mayor, how are you? I was afraid I'd not get to see you to-day. I'm going to start out to the country again this afternoon." The Mayor introduced the stranger. "Mr. Crane, this is Mr. Olmstead, district attorney for the I. & G. N. Railroad. The city has been having a little difference with the company over placing watchmen at the crossings, and one or two other matters; Mr. Olmstead and I have talked the matter over and reached an understanding which we think is fair to both the city and the railroad, but before closing up the agreement finally, we thought we would run in and talk over the legal phases of the case with you. It was this I had in mind when I asked you the other day at what time I could find you in your office. You have probably forgotten I asked you, your mind is so full of politics."

"I am glad to know you, Mr. Olmstead." Walter had shaken hands with the newcomer and all were seated before the Mayor had finished his little speech. "And I am more than glad you and the Mayor have reached an agreement. If

HIRAM BLAIR

he has agreed to what you propose I know the city of Morrison will not suffer."

"You are quite right there, Mr. Crane," suavely responded Olmstead; "your city is fortunate in having a Mayor who is alert and active in caring for her interests, and withal, intelligently so."

"Yes, Walter, I believe Morrison has gotten a very fair settlement," agreed the Mayor. "Mr. Olmstead was disposed to be liberal when he discovered that our demands were not unreasonable and we got along together famously. Now let us look into the legal details. I know what we want, but I leave it to you lawyers to frame up the agreement in language so nobody will understand it but lawyers."

After a few minutes consumed in putting the agreement into legal phraseology, the Mayor looked at his watch and rose hastily.

"By George, gentlemen! I must be going. It's past my dinner time now, and my wife thinks there is n't any possible excuse for a man being late to his meals. I suppose you lawyers will want to visit a while, and hope you will

THE TEMPTER APPEARS

excuse me. Good-bye, Mr. Olmstead; come back and see us again."

And he was gone.

"I see you are mixing some in politics, Mr. Crane," softly observed Olmstead. "Not a very promising career for a young lawyer nowadays."

"No, I suppose it is not," replied Walter. "But I have been drawn into this campaign by a desire to do some service for my county and State. I do not intend to give much attention to politics in the future."

"Ah, that is what they all say, but, Mr. Crane, 'a little leaven leaveneth the whole loaf.' It is so in politics. Once started it is almost impossible to quit. You make a hard fight in this campaign, and put yourself under obligations to a great many men. Next campaign some of them will be running for some office, and they will call on you for help. You will not refuse them. The Mayor tells me he is with you in this fight because you helped him. Soon you will make enemies who will give their business to other lawyers, and you with your talents for leadership and ingenuity will in a short time come to be

HIRAM BLAIR

looked upon as a boss. Then the people will take it for granted that you are corrupt, and your enemies will be able to spread ugly rumors about you with ease. The political lawyer, Mr. Crane, rarely makes money out of anything but politics."

Walter did not understand the trend of Mr. Olmstead's remarks, but he spoke with such kindness and apparent frankness there was nothing for Walter to do but respond in the same way, so he answered:

"I recognize the wisdom of what you say, but it has been my belief that all of us have a certain share of the public burden to carry, and that it is cowardly to shirk when one thinks he sees his duty clear."

"One's first duty is to himself, Mr. Crane. For illustration, our office has observed you and your work, as we make it a practice to observe young lawyers along our line, and we get excellent accounts of you. We learn that you are industrious, conscientious, and intelligent in handling your cases; and best of all you thoroughly understand them before you go into trial. Now, we are looking for such young lawyers, but

THE TEMPTER APPEARS

our general solicitor has an idea that when young lawyers go into politics deeply it impairs their usefulness in the profession. He always asks the question as to whether any one we recommend for appointment is interested in politics."

"I do not quite catch the drift of your talk, Mr. Olmstead."

"Well, to speak plainly, we are thinking of appointing a local attorney in Morrison, and if we do, we will give him considerable work at other points along this division which is in my district. As you know, Congressman Hinckley is our County Attorney, but since he has been in Congress he has practically abandoned our work, and we have been obliged to send other attorneys into Douglas County to look after our matters in your courts. I would like very much to recommend your appointment, Mr. Crane, but I fear our general solicitor would turn it down if you are actively engaged in political work. Of course, we do not intend to disturb Congressman Hinckley, though his connection with us will be merely nominal now that he is in Congress. It is contrary to the policy of the company to let out men who have been with it for many years,

HIRAM BLAIR

so it would be necessary that he should endorse the recommendation, which could be easily arranged, I imagine."

A great light dawned on Walter. At first he felt disposed to throw Olmstead out of his office, and to hunt up Mayor Hopkins and give him a thrashing. But before Olmstead finished Walter's diplomatic spirit got the better of his anger and he determined to find out how deep into the conspiracy the Mayor was.

"Why, Mr. Olmstead!" he exclaimed. "If I was to quit this campaign Mayor Hopkins and my friends here would mob me. They are completely wrapped up in this fight."

"My dear sir," urged Olmstead, "the Mayor told me himself it is because he is under obligations to you and the Sheriff that he is taking such an interest in the fight. He is so intensely loyal to you he would follow you anywhere. You need not fear that he would desert you no matter what you do. He did n't have the slightest idea of what I might say to you. He could n't, for I did not contemplate having this talk with you myself until after I came into your office, but the Mayor is your friend through and through."

THE TEMPTER APPEARS

Walter jotted down on his memory tablet a memorandum which would have read, if legible, "Watch Mayor Hopkins." Then he replied to the proposition:

"Mr. Olmstead, your suggestions are couched in such language as estops me from saying exactly what is in my mind, and we will close this interview without any harsh words being spoken. I do not care to censure you for coming to me with this suggestion, as I suppose it comes within the pale of your semi-official duties as the political agent of the railroad company, which is, as I well know, under strong obligations to Congressman Hinckley. I shall not feel any resentment toward you on my account, either, for you have not known me and could not foresee how I might regard your offer. With this, you may say to those who sent you that I am in politics up to the day of the primaries in Douglas County, and unless we succeed in our efforts to dislodge Congressman Hinckley at that time I shall be in politics until such time as we do dislodge him. As this determination disqualifies me for the position of local attorney for the I. & G. N. Railroad, I take it for granted the position will not be

HIRAM BLAIR

created. If at any time you have any legitimate business to transact with me, I shall treat you as if this incident had not happened. Good-day, Mr. Olmstead."

Olmstead did not flinch. He was accustomed to trying situations. He looked Walter squarely in the eye, and said:

"Crane, you are the right stuff. Most men, feeling as you do, would have gotten tragic. I want to say to you that I admire your courage and your honesty as well as your discretion. But some day you will remember what I say to you now. The way of the man who sets out to reform politics is a rough road. Your enemies scatter thorns along it and your friends drag at your feet with demands that you swerve from the straight path. The by-ways into the fields ripe for the harvest always look more inviting, and few men ever follow the rocky road steadfastly to the end of their political journey. Good-bye, old fellow."

CHAPTER XXXV

THE STORM BREAKS

TUESDAY afternoon at Rockford, Walter got his mail. The first letter he read was a note from Florence. He silently handed it to Hiram. It ran:

"Dearest: I must see you at once. Do not delay an instant when you get this note, but come at once, no matter what is in the way. I will be in the depths of despair until you come. You should get this note at Rockford, Tuesday, and I will expect you that evening. Please do not fail me.

"FLORENCE."

"The storm has bust," said Hiram dryly, as he handed the note back to Walter. "I've seed it comin' fer a week er two. Dave Hinckley's playin' his trump card. That railroad feller's offer was only a feeler. He's started in on the wimmen folks. Oh, Walt! These wimmen! I'm powerful glad my wife hain't sense enough to git into sassiety or polyticks."

[295]

HIRAM BLAIR

"Why, Hiram, what do you think it is?"
Walter was anxious and alarmed.

"Simply this, my boy." Hiram placed his hand affectionately on Walter's shoulder. "That Bassett gal got you into this fracas an' now she's undertook to git you outen it. I hain't heerd the particklars, but I've seed enough to know that Ol' Dave wuz up to some sort of speshul deviltry. They've made your gal think that polyticks is ruinin' you an' that you're goin' straight to the dogs."

"Perhaps I am," responded Walter moodily.

"Thar ain't no man yit that's beat Judas what's-his-name outen the record ez the meanest criminal of the world, Walt. An' all he done wuz to betray his Saviour to His enemies, so's they could crucify Him. But Judas died without any children an' his blood spilled out in the field, so you ain't got none of his blood in you. You may be a little shaky on morals, but you're not so wicked ez these people would like to hev you be."

"I can't believe you are right, Hiram, but I don't see how I can go to New Boston to-night."

"To-night!" Hiram fairly roared. "Of

THE STORM BREAKS

course you 're not goin' there to-night. You 've got ter turn this township over to Houston to-night. Your gal kin wait; it 'll do her good. She 'll hev time to think. She 's a good gal, an' won't never want you to go ag'in' Judas fer the traitor's medal when she understands it right. Now you go an' telegraph her you kain't come till to-morrer night. We 've got a corkus over there to-morrer night, an' you kin kill two birds with one stone. Then come back an' let me talk a little sense into that head o' yourn."

It was an hour before they had any time to themselves. Hiram took Walter back behind a building and they sat on a dry goods box.

"Walt, this here 's bad bizness. I ain't much of a lady's man, but I 've had enough to do with Ol' Dave Hinckley to know that he 'd not stop at anything to win this fight. He 's got some of his henchmen an' hench wimmen to worry that gal of yourn into believin' she 's got ter make you quit, or you 'll ruin yourself with whiskey, an' fightin', an' she 'll try it, too, mark my words, I 'll admit the circumstanshal evydence is much ag'in' you, an' thar 's no show fer you to prove a alibi. You 'll jest haf ter plead guilty an' set up

HIRAM BLAIR

what you lawyers call a plea of justificashun an' try to talk her into givin' you a short sentence — say thirty days."

Hiram's tone was one of deep sympathy though his words were jocular.

"I hope you are mistaken, Hiram; I can't quit now."

"Now you're talkin' right, my boy. You kain't quit. We'll lose the fight ef you quit, an' you'll be known ez a deserter all your life. I'm sorry fer you, my boy; it's goin' to be hard fer you. You take things so all-fired serious. Ef you wuz only older an' had more hoss sense. But let me tell you somethin', Walt. Ef that gal sez you've got ter crawfish in this fight or take back your ring, you stand pat, do you hear? You stand pat. She'll come to her feed, Walt, sure pop. An' ef she don't, there's plenty of females in this country who don't fancy livin' single. You're a likely enough lookin' chap, or will be when this fight's over, an' they quit disfigerin' you. Soon's you git so the bank clerks won't frown an' look juberous when your check is pushed at 'em, you'll find no trouble in gittin' all the gals you want to shine up to you.

THE STORM BREAKS

There 's that Jenkins' gal; she 's dead in love with you —"

"Hiram," Walter interrupted savagely, "if you want me to listen to you, don't talk to me that way. Rose Jenkins is Florence Bassett's most intimate girl friend, and thinks of me only as her friend."

"P'r'aps so, Walt; it ain't no affair of mine, nohow. But you 've got too goldarned much sentiment in you fer a polytishun. This bizness of Fate takin' keer of love an' marriage is all bunkum. Fate ain't in that line of bizness. Ef I had n't happened to meet Suse when I did, I 'd a married some other gal an' she 'd ben b'ilin' beans fer the pris'ners in the jail, an' Suse 'd like ez not ben helpin' her husband plough over in Hoop-pole Township. But Suse suits me, an' I suit her — leastways I do most of the time when there ain't no campaign on.

"You seem to think, boy, that this here thing they call Fate in the story books fixed things up so 's there 's nobody on earth will do you fer a wife but the Bassett gal, an' she hez the same noshun in her head, to be sure. But it 's all tommyrot. This noshun that a feller kain't love

HIRAM BLAIR

but onct an' that he's got ter find the right woman before he kin fall in love with her is what story books is made out of, but when it comes down to the real thing, there's mighty little of it outside the kivers of them books. Ef that Bassett gal don't come down off her high hoss, Walt, you show her the stuff you're made of. We kain't afford to let Ol' Dave beat us by bringin' out the petticoat brigade."

Walter was unwilling to accept Hiram's philosophy.

"You are not in the least sentimental, Hiram, and don't understand these things. I'll not try to make you see this matter as I do. I feel certain you are mistaken in your idea of what is the trouble. At any rate, you may depend upon it, I'll not desert Mr. Houston until the fight is won or lost. We put him into this fight and we must go with him to the end, whether it is to defeat or victory."

"Walt, you air a thoroughbred." Hiram's voice was earnest and his countenance was serene. He knew after that promise no influence, however powerful, could swerve Walter from the path he had laid out to follow.

CHAPTER XXXVI

WALTER MAKES A SERIOUS MISTAKE

AS Walter and Hiram were driving through the main street of New Boston the next afternoon, they were hailed by a mixed crowd of Democratic voters from different townships, who had gathered to talk over the coming primary. It was quite evident that partisans of both Hinckley and Houston were in the crowd, as there were signs of dispute and disagreement. Hiram knew all of the men, and jumped out of the buggy to greet them. He called them all by their first names and made each one think he was delighted to see him. Walter was not so well acquainted, and his natural reserve was made more noticeable and more embarrassing to him by Hiram's effusiveness. Walter felt that he was at a disadvantage, which caused him unconsciously to put on a chilly demeanor and led the countrymen to think that he

HIRAM BLAIR

was an aristocrat, unwilling to associate with them. This barrier between them brought about disastrous results a few minutes later.

"Well, boys," Hiram cheerily exclaimed, "I s'pose you're talkin' polyticks. How's things in your parts?"

One of the Houston men spoke up:

"My township's fer Houston all right, an' I wuz just offerin' to bet Jim Ricketts here five ag'in' ten that Houston beats Hinckley in the county. They kain't bluff me with their offerin' odds on Hinckley. I'm willin' to bet 'em s' long's I got a dollar."

"What odds air they offerin'?" queried Hiram.

"Two to one on Hinckley, an' no takers," interposed a Hinckley supporter.

"Well, boys, I don't bet, 'cause I b'long to the church an' it's ag'in' my religi'n, but if I wuz a bettin' man I'd like to take a few hundred of that kind of bets. You boys air all friends of mine, an' I would n't fool you. You kin jest set it down straight an' tell people I tol' you, that Sam Houston is jest ez sure to be the next Congressman from this district ez the primary is to be held. Now, let's go in here an' git a drink.

WALTER MAKES A MISTAKE

We may scatter a leetle on other things, but we kin agree on that, all right."

This proposal was met with enthusiastic and unanimous approval. All but Walter made a bee line for the saloon, and he was unable to get away without giving offence, so he permitted himself to be drawn into the place against his will.

"What 'll you hev, boys? Take a drink to our next Congrissman, honest Sam Houston," shouted Hiram. In ten seconds every man in the place, most of them Hinckley men, was lined up at the bar.

When the bartender reached Walter he quietly said:

"Give me some mineral water, please." But it was not to be; one of the Hinckley men noticing this manœuvre was quick to call attention to it.

"The Morrison gent is too high-toned to drink good Democratic whiskey with us country jakes, but he wants to tell us how to vote." He spoke loud enough for all to hear.

Hiram stepped on Walter's toe, and that gentleman quickly bowed to the inevitable.

HIRAM BLAIR

"I said mineral water on the side." Walter addressed the bartender. "You must have misunderstood me."

So he drank the whiskey on this day of all days when he should have avoided it.

Another round was ordered, which Walter paid for, and they made their escape from the crowd, going straight to the Sheriff's office. Walter groaned when they were safely inside.

"I was a fool to go in there and drink with those fellows. If they are telling Florence all the mean things I do, they'll get word to her about this."

"P'r'aps I had n't oughter started anything, Walt; I 'm sorry, but I did n't think until it was too all-fired late. 'Thar 's nothin' to it, my boy, polyticks an' love makin' don't jibe together no-way at all. It would hev ben jest ez well not to take them fellers in an' buy 'em drinks, but I could n't help it. Don't go to see your gal till after supper, but don't eat any of these fool things to kill the smell of that whiskey on your breath. I tried that onct, an' Suse broke me of it. She sez, 'Hiram, you've ben drinkin' an' you're ashamed of it fer you've ben eatin' stuff

WALTER MAKES A MISTAKE

to fool me. If drinkin' whiskey makes your breath so it ain't fit to associate with decent people, why don't you quit it?" I could n't answer that sort of talk, an' sence then I 've never tried to adulterate my breath.

"Now, Walt, while you 're havin' your troubles with your gal, I 'm goin' to hev some trouble, too. I 've got ter git Sam Houston to let me hev some money to give to some of our fellers so they kin take them bets."

"What is that for?"

"Why, simple, don't you know that nearly every mother's son of a Democrat in Indiany is s'pecting Tom Hendricks to be nomynated for President and is a'ready pickin' out the offis he 's goin' to ask fer? The Congrissman 'll make the recommends, an' ef these fellers git the idee inter their heads that Houston 's got no show, he won't have any. In this here fight them fellers what ain't looking fer the commissary waggin is lookin' fer the band waggin. Ef they see the musishuns climbin' inter Ol' Hinckley's waggin, they 'll foller 'em quick. We dassent let money go beggin' at odds of two to one on Hinckley. In hoss racin' it don't make no diff'runce what

HIRAM BLAIR

the odds air so long 's your hoss is the best an' you 're on the inside of the fixin', but in poly-ticks, 'tain't never safe to let the other feller hev the big side of the bettin', so we 've got ter turn some of Houston's campaign money into takin' bets, an' I 've got ter persuade him it 's a righteous thing to do."

"How much is he worth? How long can he stand this? The demands on him are terrific."

"What 's that book the furrin noblemen look up when they come over here lookin' fer wives? Well, he ain't in thet, but I 've had the keounty records looked up and he owns a thousand acres of the best land in Douglas Keounty, an' hez good mortgidges on another thousand, so I think he 'll last through one campaign ef his nerve don't freeze up."

As Walter left the hotel after supper, he met Rose Jenkins on the street. She ran up to him instantly and greeted him with great cordiality.

"Oh, Mr. Crane, I 'm so glad to see you. I suppose I ought to say it was an accident, but it was n't. I knew you were coming, and I came down particularly to see you. I wanted so much to talk to you before you see Florence."

WALTER MAKES A MISTAKE

"That is very kind of you, Rose, and I certainly am glad you came. Will you walk along with me?"

"Yes, I will go with you part of the way toward Florence's as I know you are anxious to see her and I do not want to keep you away from her a minute. Poor dear Florence! She is having such a dreadful time."

"Tell me, Rose, what is all this trouble?"

"Oh, it's all on account of these dreadful gossips in New Boston who have determined to make Florence's life miserable. They have told her such terrible stories about you. I don't believe a word of them, and Florence does n't either — but why did n't you come yesterday?"

"I could n't; I had to speak at the meeting last night."

"If you could have seen Florence's face, when she got your despatch, you could n't have made a speech for thinking how miserable she was. It makes her so unhappy to think that you got into all this trouble just because she asked you to defeat Senator Hinckley. I saw the Hinckley girls on the street to-day, and they smiled at me sweetly and looked so triumphant. They think

HIRAM BLAIR

their father's sure to win now. I just hate them!"

"Why do they think their father has a better chance now, Rose?"

"Why, I—I don't know, only they know Mrs. Bassett is almost hysterical, and Florence has been persuaded to get you to give up the fight."

"But I am not going to abandon the fight, Rose; I can't."

Rose's hand on Walter's arm gave it an involuntary squeeze, but she controlled herself instantly.

"I would give anything, Mr.—ah, Walter, to see Senator Hinckley defeated, and those stuck up Hinckley girls taken down, but you must not forget what you owe to Florence. She is the dearest, loveliest girl on earth, and oh, she has so much to bear! It would drive me distracted. She is a girl of such strong nature, so firm in her convictions, so high-minded, and she loves you with all the intensity of her soul. If she thought it would be best for you, Walter, she would refuse to marry you. You must not act or

WALTER MAKES A MISTAKE

“speak hastily, for you do not know what a great strain Florence has been under or how the last few days have wrought her up.”

They walked on a short distance silently, Walter in deep thought; at length he broke the silence.

“Rose, I love Florence with all my heart. She is the only girl I ever cared for, and the only one I ever expect to love. I have regretted the unpleasant incidents of this campaign on her account only. I do not mind them myself. It is true that Florence asked me to do this thing, but I would not have done it if I had not thought it was right. She did not know the difficulties in the way, nor did I. Florence is no way responsible for them, and has no right to feel that she is. I know I have been slandered and that it has influenced Florence to feel herself responsible for the disgraceful stories they are telling about me. The arrant cowards, lacking courage or strength to fight us in the open, are adopting the stratagems of the serpent. They haven’t even the decency of the rattlesnake, which shakes its rattles before it strikes, but they

HIRAM BLAIR

rank with the vile copperhead that sneaks through the grass and plants its poisoned fangs in its victim without warning."

Rose shuddered and clasped Walter's arm convulsively.

"Rose, I say to you now, that Florence must not ask me to compromise with dishonor and break my pledge to my friends. There is nothing I would not do for Florence where honor was not involved, but I must so conduct myself now and forever that I am able to maintain my own self-respect. This I cannot do if I should desert this campaign now in the heat of battle and when the victory is all but won."

Rose was crying softly, but she looked up with admiration and fervent sympathy in her eyes. Claspings Walter's hand she said simply:

"Here we are at the gate; I must leave you. Be gentle, kind, and considerate; remember what Florence has passed through."

Rose stood a moment gazing at Walter as he strode sturdily up the stone walk of the Bassett home. As she turned away she murmured to herself:

"When steel meets steel."

[310]

CHAPTER XXXVII

THE PARTING OF THE WAYS

“**O**H, Walter, it seems an age since I last saw you! Why have you been away so long? Why did n't you come last night when I asked you?”

Florence was resting lovingly against Walter's right shoulder with his good arm about her, and her right hand gently fondling his left arm encased in splints and hanging in a sling.

“My darling, I could n't leave the meeting last night. It was only last Thursday night I was here and this is Wednesday. You must remember we are now in the last days of the campaign. Then I was n't fit to leave my room on Sunday.”

“But you could be out every other day in this miserable campaign, killing yourself.” She looked up at him with a quick, anxious gaze.

“How wan and thin you are! You are wearing yourself out, ruining your prospects and

HIRAM BLAIR

making bitter enemies, and it is all my doing. Walter, it nearly drives me crazy to think what the foolish whim of a headstrong girl has brought about. I cannot forgive myself unless I do something to repair this great wrong I've done. God knows I've suffered enough."

Walter led her tenderly to a seat on a couch and sat down beside her. Stroking her forehead gently as her head lay against his shoulder, he broke out with deep feeling:

"Florence dear, the only pain or displeasure this campaign gives me is to hear you talk this way. I know you have suffered far more than I, because I am in the thick of the fight, and have but little time to think of other things than the campaign. It grieves me bitterly to know that you hold yourself responsible for these viperous attacks of my enemies, and that is all I care for them. They are assailing me in every way to break me down and force me to desert the fight. They have been telling you stories with just enough of truth in them to make them the more malicious falsehoods. They are cowards and poltroons, darling, who seek to save the day by desecrating the love of a pure and noble girl."

[812]

THE PARTING OF THE WAYS

Florence trembled as with a chill. Her hands were icy cold and she sobbed violently as Walter went on:

"I know, Florence, something of what you have passed through since that dreadful Thursday night after we parted, and I will hear all you have to say, but you must hear me first. You and I are the victims of a plot cunningly planned by Congressman Hinckley to drive me out of this campaign, and carried out by his friends, under his direction. They have tried other means to influence me to quit, and have failed. If I should desert Houston at this critical stage, he could not carry Morrison by a very large majority and he would lose ground in other places. In fact, since I was the one who started the movement, they believe it would fall to pieces if I should quit, so they have as a last resort come to this. I do not know what they have told you, but I do know that they have wrought up your feelings until you are not looking at the situation as it really is. Florence, I have thought it all over carefully, weighing every point, and I have reached a final and —"

"No! No! No!" cried Florence, springing up.

[313]

HIRAM BLAIR

"Don't say that. You must not until you hear me. This means too much for both of us."

"I will listen to you, sweetheart, when you are ready." Walter drew her back to her place on the couch, and there was a long silence, broken only by Florence's sobs and the wild beating of their hearts. In time Florence became quiet and began:

"Walter, it is only my great love for you that leads me to say what I shall say. If I loved you less I would not demean myself as I have and as I will. Since Thursday night this town has been in a turmoil of excitement and your name has been bandied about on the streets without any respect whatever. If I didn't know the New Boston people were such cowards I would really have been afraid to have you come here. The young man, Davidson, is rather seriously hurt, they tell me, and will always wear a scar. They hold you responsible for it all, and paint you in the deepest color of villainy. Oh, Walter, it makes my heart ache so! I knew but little of this until Monday when a tale-bearing woman came in to tell me some gossip I would not hear. She told my mother. Then our pastor called

THE PARTING OF THE WAYS

and it was his mission to warn me against you. They have nearly driven mother into hysterics, and she is a constant care to me."

"Poor, abused girl! How I would like to horsewhip the whole town," exclaimed Walter angrily.

"The minister told us what the people say and gave me some advice. He said nothing against your character or I would not have listened to him. He spoke very kindly of you —"

"The old hypocrite," interrupted Walter.

"Don't interrupt me please, dear. It is hard enough for me without that. The minister spoke of evils that beset young men who go into politics and intimated that you are falling a victim to these temptations, which, I fear is true. You have not denied that you go into saloons and drink with the men, and that you are out in all kinds of weather, late at night, exposing yourself to all sorts of hardships. You know if you should do these things when we are married it would make my life miserable, and then the thought would haunt me forever that I alone was responsible. Oh, Walter, can't you see that I could n't stand it? It would kill me to see you

HIRAM BLAIR

ruined by politics. I have thought and prayed. It has been the consuming idea of every waking moment, darling, and I can see plainly now there is but one course open. For your own sake and mine, Walter dear, you must give up politics and — liquor."

"Florence, tell me some of the things they have been saying."

"What they have said about you, Walter, does not matter, for I do not believe them. I love you and trust you. But *you* have told me the truth. It is upon what you have told me that I've made my decision."

"Please tell me, Florence, I want to know just how black I've been painted."

"If you insist on hearing it, they said it was your fault that the accident happened Thursday night; that you had been drinking after you left me; and that you were under the influence when you fell Saturday night. And then some one came and told mother this evening that you had been seen leading a crowd of men into a saloon here this afternoon and drinking with them — Walter forgive me for telling it, I would not if you had not insisted."

THE PARTING OF THE WAYS

A look of intense anger spread over Walter's countenance as he followed the drift of the cunningly devised plot to weave the incidents of the week into a story of his degradation.

"I thank you, darling, for telling me," he replied. "I supposed it was some such stories. You know yourself there is no truth in the first story, for the assault was made only a half hour after I left you here. The second story is just as false. I was weak and faint as a man is likely to be two days after he has had his arm broken, and overtaxed my strength. The third part of the story is true."

Walter waited for Florence to speak, but she was silent. He went on: "Florence, it is now of no consequence who was responsible in the first instance for this campaign against Hinckley being started. You were not responsible, for if I had not taken it up, you would not have insisted, and this I know very well. I did take it up, persuaded Hiram Blair to join me in it, and we have together organized the county for Mr. Houston. We gave our word of honor to him that we would stand by him to the last. My honor is at stake. If I should desert now, I

HIRAM BLAIR

would deserve no more consideration than the soldier who deserts in the face of the enemy. You could not love or respect me if I should do that. I would do anything for you save sacrifice my honor and you would not have me do that. If I should desert, I could never look Hiram Blair nor Sam Houston in the face if I lived to be a hundred years old. I cannot, dare not, grant your demand."

Florence was swayed by the impulsive reasoning and the earnestness of Walter's words, but she had become too firmly entrenched behind the fortresses of love's unreason to surrender easily.

"What are these men to you, Walter, that you owe them so much more than you do me? Is it not true that when you came into my life and won my heart you were pure, honest, respected, free from the influences of low politics; that you scorned evil companions and conducted yourself in such a manner that you were worthy of my love and confidence? You know that I did not give my love to a man who would unblushingly lead a crowd of low men into a groggery with the eyes of an entire community upon him. No, no, Walter, much as I may despise myself for

THE PARTING OF THE WAYS

having induced you to go into this campaign, it lies with you alone to undo the great wrong I have done. Your obligation is not to the girl whose foolish whim of the thoughtless hour made this outrageous demand of you, but to the girl whose love for you grew up out of all that is noble and true in her character. You do not love the girl of the foolish fancy, Walter, but there must be something higher and better in my nature that commands your heart. Every impulse of my better nature cries out that this great mistake of my life shall be blotted out, and you alone can do it. You must, to save me from despair, rise above the life my demand has thrust you into. Does this not impose upon you, my darling, an obligation higher and more sacred than your word given to these men that you would help them gain political advantage? Oh, Walter, love, if you cannot see this now, how can I hope that you will forsake all others and lift me safely over the mistakes my impulsive nature will lead me into all the years of my life?"

Walter winced under this affecting appeal, yet he could still see that his duty was plain. As Florence pleaded with him he could see in his

HIRAM BLAIR

mind's eye Hiram Blair sitting on the dry goods box behind the store in Rockford talking to him about Judas Iscariot. He could see, too, the look of serene content that had come into Hiram's face when he secured his promise that he would not give up the fight. So he nerved himself for the final word:

"My darling, you are making this terribly hard for me. You can see your own side so clearly, yet you do not see my side. To uphold your side you must assume that all the charges my enemies have made against me are true, which I know you do not. If there was danger that their malicious predictions might come true, you might have some reason for what you say, but you have no right to believe they will come true, Florence, and you do not believe it. Oh, this is frightful! Florence, you are the one person in all the world whom I would most like to please, and yet I cannot — it's no use, my sweetheart. There is nothing that would move me more strongly to do this than your asking it, but I cannot. I feel as helpless in this matter as if you were to command me to lift a weight that surpassed my strength. I cannot do it, and if I

THE PARTING OF THE WAYS

should promise you now, I would be a pitiful coward and hypocrite, for I could not keep that promise. I have never broken a promise to you, and I will not make one I am certain to break."

The strength and firmness was fast oozing out of Florence's resolution, but she determined to make one more stand.

"Will you promise me not to go into saloons or drink liquor until I shall release you from the promise?"

Here Walter made his second great mistake of the day. Florence was weakening and he should have seen that she was falling back slowly. Her strong resolve reinforced by constant thought upon lines which added reason upon reason to her first conclusion, could not be swept aside with one assault. Walter's impetuous arguments and his insistence that he could not forsake the campaign without dishonor had shaken her confidence in the rightfulness of her own unopposed reasoning. She had all but abandoned one point of attack and was falling back upon the other. But Walter had been under too great strain in the days past to keenly observe the fine points of such a heart-to-heart conflict. He was angry

HIRAM BLAIR

with everybody who was opposed to Houston and sore in body and spirit. He had communed with himself and reached the conclusion that he was a much abused man. This demand of Florence's touched him at his sorest and he gave way to the anger that rose within him.

"Florence," he retorted angrily, "you must believe the malicious lies these people are telling about me, or you would not make this demand. It implies that I am not able to take care of myself or my character. You must think but little of me. I will say that the only time I've been near degradation in this campaign was when I was inclined to desert the fight at your demand."

Florence started back in horror. She could not have been more shocked if he had struck her; in an instant she was possessed of a consuming anger which fired her brain almost to frenzy. All her spirit was roused in resentment.

"Walter Crane," she cried hotly, "if politics has already led you to cease to be a gentleman, it is time we should part. Please leave me and do not return."

Walter had now come to his senses.

[322]



“ IF YOU INSULT ME, I CANNOT BEAR IT ”

THE PARTING OF THE WAYS

"Forgive me, Florence," he pleaded piteously, "I did not realize what I was saying. I am truly sorry. Please forgive me."

"No, no, I cannot. If you insult me, I cannot bear it. You must not see me again; go, I implore you."

Walter took his hat and lingering a moment for a sign of forgiveness which did not appear, he went dejectedly out of the parlor and into the chilly night. The evening was not unpleasant but he felt that it was bitterly cold and dark. Florence stood transfixed in the middle of the room where she rose when aroused by Walter's harsh words. She was dazed and scarcely comprehended what had happened. Then it burst upon her with all its miserable intensity, and she ran to the door calling:

"Oh, Walter, Walter!"

But he was gone.

Florence passed a sleepless, tearful night. She did not try to deceive herself into the belief that she no longer loved Walter Crane. But she felt that in some way a barrier had arisen between them, and as she thought of him through that long night it seemed to her she was looking at him

HIRAM BLAIR

through a darkened glass. Try as she would she was unable to rid herself of this feeling. It was as if something had come between them she could not fathom and which would not clear up. It baffled her, but it led her to a resolution which took shape the next morning when she made into a package the ring and the few presents Walter had given her and returned them to him. His picture which had occupied a prominent place on the dresser in her room she did not include, but put it away from the sight of all but her own eyes.

CHAPTER XXXVIII

BOUNDING UP THE TOWNSHIP WORKERS

THE township leaders of the Houston faction were gathered on that self-same night in George Jenkins' office, receiving their final instructions and information as to how high the limit was to be fixed on their distribution of the "loaves and fishes" to the hungry Hoosier voters on primary day. As Hiram Blair surveyed the assemblage he smiled in satisfaction, for he had succeeded beyond his hopes in gathering "brands from the burnin'" as he was wont to call the former supporters of Hinckley who had been proselyted into the Houston camp. Besides himself and Jenkins there answered to the roll call "Uncle Abner" English, the undisputed leader of the Democratic party in Clay Township; "Squire Jim" Craig, who had never before voted against Senator Hinckley, but was now turning every vote he could for Houston in Bullfrog; Samuel Boston, whose family was

HIRAM BLAIR

legion in Beauchamp; Ezra Haines, formerly a devoted follower of Hinckley, who was promising a safe majority for Houston in Hamilton; and "Little Joe" Bishop of Jupiter, where in his language Houston "did n't hev a smell" a few weeks before, "but now we'll beat Ol' Dave, boys, if they don't buy us back."

Sitting back in a corner by himself, looking uncomfortable but anxious, sat Silas Carter whom it will be remembered Hiram Blair had coerced into deserting Hinckley after he had accepted a suit of clothes from him. He had come into the fold and pledged his township to Houston without reservation.

As Hiram came into the office he greeted the assembled patriots with enthusiasm and burst forth:

"Well, who 'd a thunk it?" He always affected a more countrified method of speech when talking to his friends from the back townships. "Ef anybody had tol' me a month back we cud get this bunch of fellers togather to fight Ol' Dave Hinckley, I 'd a laffed like a hoss. But we 're all here, ez the sayin' is, now let 's git down to bizness."

ROUNDING UP THE WORKERS

After getting reports from each of the leaders, Hiram took Sam Houston into the side room and talked long and earnestly to him in a whisper. When Hiram finished Houston reluctantly and with great deliberation took out a bulky wallet, placed it on the table before him, sighed a long, deep sigh, haltingly and with trembling fingers untied the heavy cord that was bound about it, and counted out a number of bills, fingering each one lovingly as if bidding it an affectionate farewell. When it was counted out, Hiram ran over it hastily, crumpled up the bills, shoved them into his trousers pocket, and went back into the room where the others were waiting expectantly.

Sam Houston heaved another sigh as he saw Hiram pass out of the door. He wound the cord around his wallet carefully, replaced it in the inside pocket of his vest, felt to be sure it was there before he buttoned up his vest, then he sighed again.

The caucus had been in progress for more than an hour, when Walter Crane entered. Hiram was watching for him, and at his first glance knew what had been the outcome of his visit to

HIRAM BLAIR

Florence. He quickly started up, and called to Walter:

"Come back here in this room, Walt, just a minute; I want to talk to you."

When the door closed on the others, Hiram burst out:

"Brace up, ol' man, you look like the chief mourner at a funeral. Ef them fellers had got a good look at you, they 'd swear Houston did n't hev a show on earth. Here, take a big swig of this whiskey. I brung it along fearin' somethin' like this. Drink it an' fergit."

"I can't forget, Hi, it's all over. I made an ass of myself."

"Nonsense, boy, you two 'll be cooin' like turtle doves ez soon 's this primary's over. Take another swaller. The color is comin' back in your face. Now, listen to me quick. We mus' git back in there right away. We've ben talkin' over a plan thet you've got to carry out, an' I 'm s'posed to be explainin' it to you now. You understand? We 'll go into it more out there, but you've agreed to it ginerally in here."

"What is it, Hiram?"

ROUNDING UP THE WORKERS

"Oh, Walt, you know I kain't take time in here to tell you. Just keep still until you ketch on. Now you look better, we 'll go out."

The men of the caucus were becoming somewhat impatient when Hiram and Walter emerged from their privacy. Hiram pacified them:

"Well, boys, Mr. Crane thinks our plan is all right, an' sez he 'd rather we 'd all talk it over amongst ourselves, an' ef he hez any idees diffrunt from ourn, he 'll make 'em known ez we perceed, so I did n't go very deep into the details. All of us hev agreed that we oughter make a harder fight on Dave Hinckley's record in the State Legislature, an' we 'd decided, Walt, fer you to say what you think of the notion of sendin' to Indynapolis an' gittin' copies of the Senate Journal an' markin' 'em so's to show how Ol' Dave voted ag'in' the common people an' fer the corporations, an' send men out all over the keounty with these Journals, so's they kin show 'em to the voters an' let 'em know by the acktil record how Dave hez misrepresented 'em. Thet's the straight goods an' he kain't deny it like he 's ben doin' all his life."

[329]

HIRAM BLAIR

"The idea seems to be a good one but have you figured out how to get it to working?" Walter inquired.

"Thet's jist what we want of you," rejoined Hiram. "Nobody else but you kin git them Journals an' mark 'em so's the workers kin handle 'em intelligently. We're dependin' on you fer that part of the work."

"But how am I to do it? Every day of my time up to the primary is taken up already."

"Easy now, Walt; you're a good soldier an' kin stand a leetle extry marchin'. There's a train leaves here at four o'clock to-morrer mornin' an' gits to Indynapolis at nine; then there's a train leaves Indynapolis at three o'clock an' gits here a leetle afore eight. You've got ter speak at Honeybend schoolhouse to-morrer night, but it's only eight miles from Johnsonville an' the road is good. George Jenkins will speak fust. You take that train, git the Journals an' back on the night train. We'll meet you with a buggy at Johnsonville, an' take you out. Then next mornin' we'll send out the fellers with the Journals. You'll hev to show

ROUNDING UP THE WORKERS

'em how to use 'em, but we 'll gether up the men to-morrer while you 're at the capital."

"There is n't anything else you expect me to do before to-morrow night is there, Hiram?"

"Well, we have n't thought of anythin' else jest yit, Walt. Thet ain't a hard job. You kin sleep on the way up to Indynapolis, and mark the books on your way back. An' you 've got so used to talkin', when you git your speech started out at Honeybend you kin go to sleep and you 'll keep right on talkin'."

"It will not be easy to handle those Journals on the train with only one hand to work with. I may not be able to get them all ready by the time I get back. My opinion is that Congressman Hinckley's record in the State Senate was pretty bad and the Journals will require a great deal of marking."

"Why don't we git Ol' Dave's record in Washin'ton while we 're at it?" inquired "Uncle Abner" English.

"He has only been in Congress one session and part of another," explained Walter, "and has n't had an opportunity to do much there. Besides,

HIRAM BLAIR

the people do not thoroughly understand the questions of that nature which come up in Congress, and it would be very difficult to prove much against him in his Congressional record."

"Uncle Abner," put in Hiram, "you know thet you never kin make a Berkshire hog outen a razorback by takin' him outen the woods an' puttin' him in a pen, don't you? Sendin' Ol' Dave to Washin'ton hez n't changed his breed."

"Well, gentlemen," Walter resumed, "I guess I can undertake this commission, though I could use a little rest to good advantage. You say you will meet me with a buggy at Johnsonville, Hiram?"

Hiram turned to Houston, "Sam, ef them Hinckley hellians hed knowed what kind of stuff ther is in Walt when they hed him down that night, they 'd never stopped at breakin' his arm. They 'd a murdered him. Now this Journal business is settled, let 's git through with the other things."

CHAPTER XXXIX

HIRAM TRIES TO CHEER UP WALTER

THIS hez ben a right smart of a night, Walt," Hiram naively remarked as they left the meeting at Jenkins' office. "But there 's nothin' like polyticks fer makin' a man fergit his other troubles."

Walter was in no mood for levity. He replied morosely: "Perhaps not, Hiram, but I cannot forget. You must excuse me. I'm going to the hotel to turn in and get a few hours' sleep before I take the train for Indianapolis."

"Walt, you talk like a ninny. Do you s'pose I 'm goin' to let you go to that hotel an' roll an' toss erbout, an' chase bedbugs all night an' you thinkin' all the time what a turr'ble mean world this is to live in? Don't you s'pose I know you would n't sleep a wink? The chances air thet by mornin' you'd be so all-fired mean tempered you'd want to fight the hull State milishy with that one good arm. No, my boy, you 're goin'

HIRAM BLAIR

home with me, an' I 'm goin' to try to put a leetle sunshine through them clouds. Unless you git into a better humor, you could n't git a copy of the Senate Journal in Indynapolis to-morrer ef the streets wuz paved with 'em."

They were soon in the dining-room of the Sheriff's house adjoining the jail. As they passed it, Hiram jerked his thumb toward the gloomy and forbidding old building and sagely remarked:

"There 's several fellers in there, Walt, 'ud be mighty pleased to change places with you to-night, an' swap their troubles for yourn, even, or give boot."

On the table was a plate of cold meat, some bread and butter and small cakes. Hiram went to a cupboard and brought out a bottle with the government seal unbroken.

"It was this an' polyticks that got you into tr'uble, Walt, an' polyticks an' this will help you fergit it. Thet 's one thing I 've always sed fer whiskey when other people wuz talkin' ag'in' it. It 'll git a man inter trouble, but it 's always ready to help him fergit it."

"I don't care for any of it, thank you, Hi.

[334]

HIRAM TRIES TO CHEER WALTER

I'll eat a little and we'll just sit here and talk, unless you want a drink."

"You expect me to set here an' talk to you with thet scowl on your face? Not much. We're both goin' to drink enough to git us in a good humor, that's all. It wuz this here same ol' Kaintucky Bourbon, Walt, that reunited the North an' the South, an' got 'em both in a good humor with each other. We fit 'em back into the stock-pen with powder an' bullets, but it was this here stuff that actilly saved the Union."

"How was that, Hiram? You've got me guessing now. I never heard such a foolish thing as that before."

"Well, boy, take a little swig of it, an' I'll tell you. It wuz this way: After the war we sent our carpet-baggers down South to run things fer 'em, an' they proved to the Southerners thet their fust idee wuz correct, and thet the Yankees wuz all a set of thieves an' pirates. They knowed it all the time in their hearts, but when the carpet-baggers come down there, that wuz corroborative evidence, ez I b'leeve you lawyers eall it. So matters went from bad to wuss so far 's makin' the people of the North an' South feel neighborly.

HIRAM BLAIR

They hated us an' wuz powerful proud of it; we despised 'em, an' felt that we wuz doin' our bounden duty. There wuz n't but one thing that sorter formed a link of brotherly feelin' between us, an' that wuz this Kaintucky Bourbon, made on the borderland, some of it in the sunlight, an' some of it the moonlight, but all of it with the sperit of unionism in ev'ry drop.

"Somehow, Walt, there 's a sort of feller feelin' you hev fer a man, wherever he wuz born or wherever you may think he 's goin' after he dies, when you an' him air drinkin' out of the same bottle. I kain't explain it, an' don't want to try, but it 's there, sure 's you 're born. An' when the Colonels of the South would come up here an' find the Colonels of the North drinkin' the same stuff they wuz used to, only without so many trimmin's, they diskivered that they wuz not in a furrin country after all. An' when a Yankee Colonel went down South an' got tangled up with Kaintucky mint julips he could n't hev no hard feelin' ag'in' the country where such things ez them wuz so plenty. I seen two ol' veterans one night when I wuz down South buyin' hosses. They wuz settin' at a table drinkin' mint julips

HIRAM TRIES TO CHEER WALTER

an' talkin' 'bout the war. One wuz a Northerner an' the other a Southerner. They 'd quarrel, then they 'd drink an' make up. Finally, along in the shank of the night, they got up from the table, both staggerin', an' fell into each other's arms, an' ez the tears meandered down the furrers of their wrinkled ol' faces, they yelled out in one voice, 'United we stan', divided we fall.' "

"It was true both literally and figuratively, too, was n't it, Hiram?" burst forth Walter, laughing in spite of himself.

Hiram did not answer, but with a curious smile of satisfaction lifted the bottle and shook it to see how much of the liquor was gone.

"But it hez its bad parts, Walt, an' I reckon the prepounderence of the evidence is ag'in' it. The wust thing I 've got ag'in' whiskey is that it won't let up on a feller when it gits him down. When it gits a man goin' onct, it jest keeps right after him, an' never lets up until he 's a goner an' no mistake. That 's what makes it so dangerous. It give most of the fellers over there the other side of them iron doors their fust start in that direckshun an' jest kep' boostin' 'em along the road to disgrace an' deestruction. There 's only

HIRAM BLAIR

one way to handle it, Walt, an' thet 's the way I handle my tough cases when they come in here — put handcuffs an' shackles on 'em an' watch 'em all the time with both eyes.

“ 'Nuther thing ag'in' it, Walt. It ain't no good in love bizness. It makes a feller's heart beat faster, an' when he 's in love his heart 's workin' overtime ez it is. Whiskey never did do the right part by lovers, an' it hain't no bizness mixin' up in their affairs. Leastways, it don't come in good until after there 's ben a bust up, an' a feller's heart hez slowed up, an' his sperits air downcast like yours wuz to-night. An' now, Walt, let me give you a little advice: You fergit ever'thin' but Sam Houston frum now tell Saterdag week. Let your gal alone ef she lets you alone. Then when we 've laid Ol' Dave on the shelf you trot up to thet Bassett gal with Ol' Dave's politickle head in a basket. That 'll be a peace offerin' she 'll not turn down. Then you tell her you an' whiskey ain't good friends, an' you don't never calkilate to git on intimate terms with it. You tell her you air a free-born Amerykin citizen an' you don't intend to be a subjec' of any sort of a king, much less King Alkyhol.”

CHAPTER XL

THE ARREST OF BUCK JACKSON

HOWEVER much Walter tried to enter into the spirit of Hiram's effort to make him forget his troubles, he was unable to put them away. He could not avoid the feeling that politics had come between him and Florence Bassett, and his deep-seated admiration for her strong character convinced him the chasm between them could not easily be bridged over. The rough work of practical politics, so keenly enjoyed by Hiram, was naturally repugnant to Walter, and his distaste for it was heightened now by the thought that it was responsible for his break with Florence. He realized that her idea of a political campaign in which she desired her lover to engage was an honest, dignified appeal to the better side of the people's character and that it was such a view of politics she had in mind when she had urged him to take up the fight against Hinckley.

HIRAM BLAIR

While Walter feared the fight had gone too far for a change in methods to be undertaken at this stage, yet he was unwilling to let the opportunity pass without an effort to get the campaign into the straight and narrow path, so he broke out:

"Hiram, I'm thoroughly disgusted with the way we are running this campaign. The work we did there to-night made me sick at heart. Every one of those men in Jenkins' office was there because he expected money, and there is no getting around the fact that you and I are responsible for it. I confess I am more responsible than you, because I asked you to go into this fight. I feel so guilty to-night I'm not sure but I'm on the wrong side of those iron doors. How much better are we than David Hinckley? We are doing the same things exactly that he is doing while we lay claim not only with the people but with ourselves to superior virtue. I heartily wish I had never gone into this fight against him. He may be corrupt and unfaithful to his constituents, but he has never done me so great injury as I have done myself in fighting him.

"Hiram, I would not fail Sam Houston for

THE ARREST OF BUCK JACKSON

anything in the world as you know, for I 've been put to the test. But this we can do, and Houston cannot say we have failed him. We can go to him frankly and tell him he has spent all the money he ought to spend; that he has a reasonably good chance of nomination as it is, without putting out any more money, and that from this time on, we will not handle any more of his money or supervise the expenditure of any more except for legitimate expenses. If he agrees to that, we will have treated him fairly, and then we can go out and make the fight on this exposure of Dave Hinckley's record, and by appealing to the people on the strength of Sam Houston's clean personal character. What do you say, Hi?"

Hiram had taken his coat and shoes off, and was sitting with his chair tilted back against the wall, his feet on the table. As Walter finished speaking he dropped his feet to the floor and threw himself forward so he faced Walter squarely. There was a look of deep tenderness in his eyes, but his manner was aggressive. He threw his pipe on the table.

"Walt, you know I growed up in ignorance, an' pore ez a church mouse. I hain't never had

HIRAM BLAIR

no advantages, but I 'm trying to raise a fambly thet won't hev ez hard a time gettin' on ez their dad an' mam. There's a boy sleepin' in thet room in there, nearly four year ol'. He's got his pa's weaknesses in him, an' he's no end of trouble to raise. In a couple of years he 'll start to school an' 'bout the fust day he 'll try to lick the teacher an' there 'll be all kinds of a rumpus, fer that boy kin diskiver more diff'runt ways of makin' trouble than any kid I've ever heerd of. Now, Walt, what kind of a dad would I be to thet boy ef I 'd side in with him ag'in' his teacher an' tell him he need n't go to school ef he did n't want to go? Do you s'pose fer a minit he 'd stan' up an' say he 'd go anyhow? Not much. Would I be squarin' myself with the duty I owe that boy ef I 'd leave it to him to decide whether he could grow up with ignerance hangin' like shackles on his legs the same ez his daddy hez?"

"Why, no, Hiram, certainly not."

"Well, don't you see, Walt, my boy, thet we kain't square ourselves with the duty we owe to Sam Houston by leavin' it to him what is to be did in this campaign? He don't know what's good for him in this fight ag'in' Dave Hinckley

[342]

THE ARREST OF BUCK JACKSON

enny more 'n that four-year-old boy knows what 's good fer him in his fight fer a place in the world."

Hiram reached over for the whiskey bottle, shook it, looked through it and found very little of the liquor gone.

"Walt, my boy," he remarked, "you hev not taken enuff of this stuff fer it to hev gone to your head, an' I reckon it 's bein' in love thet hez set such foolish notions gallivantin' amongst them brains of yourn. You mus' git them out. I b'leeve in doin' what 's right in the long run, but I 've allus found ef I follered the reform feller 's preachin' in a campaign, he 'd git the persimmons, 'cause he wuz preachin' to me an' not to hisself.

"Ef you 're goin' to do polyticks you 've got ter meet the people on the level, an' do bizness with 'em the way they 're used to. Here in Indiany they 're used to bein' treated jist as we treated them fellers in Jenkins' offis to-night. Ef you think that them hifalutin speeches you an' George is makin' is goin' to land these Hoo-siers you air moughtily mistaken. Ef you 'd pour the likker outen this bottle an' fill it with

HIRAM BLAIR

cold tea, an' start out campaignin' with it, you 'd be a corpse before you hit the keounty line. You 've got ter give these people what they 're expectin' or they 'll quit you like a bunch of cattle goin' to their feed. Did I ever tell you, Walt, 'bout the sperience I had las' spring takin' a pris'ner outen the Bad Lands?"

"No, you never told me, Hiram; I 've heard it was quite a daring exploit and exceedingly well executed, but you never told me just how it happened. We have time for the story now, and I must hear it."

"It wuz n't so much of a job, Walt, only jest applyin' the principles of ordinary hoss sense to a tough case. Ef I 'd 'a' ben a city-bred feller, I cud n't 'a' got thet man out er them parts with a posse, but bein' jest a common greenhorn, like the natives of the Bad Lands, I done it without any help at all. I did n't go in there tryin' to make them toughs think I wuz above 'em 'cause I wuz the high Sheriff of Douglas Keounty, an' I did n't try to reform ennything or ennybody. I jest went there to git my man, an' I got him.

"It wuz like this: The Gran' Jury hed indicted Buck Jackson, a sort of ring-leader of the

THE ARREST OF BUCK JACKSON

gang of toughs thet runs wild in Haw Township, an' gives it the name of the Bad Lands. He hed come to town one day, an' turned loose in a saloon an' shot the bartender through the shoulder. Both me an' Joe wuz out of town thet day, an' Buck got away. He wuz afeard the bartender wud n't git well, so he skipped the keounty. When the bartender rounded to, Buck was indicted fer assault with intent to kill.

"Long las' March word came to me thet Buck hed come back to the keounty an' wuz out in the Bad Lands. His gang hed made their brags thet no Sheriff ever cud take a man outen their gang, an' specially Buck. Ez bad luck would hev it, Joe Simpson wuz takin' a bunch of pris'ners down to Jeffsonville to the pen, an' I wuz afeered to wait fer Joe to come back, fer I s'posed like ez not Buck would leave ag'in' an' give me the hoss laff. So I moseyed out there all by myself to git Buck an' bring him back."

"It was a foolhardy thing to do."

"Thet wuz what Suse said, too, but you see I did n't ask her advice tell I got back. I allus hed a fool notion thet I cud run the Sheriff's bizness without ever hurtin' nobody, an' I made up

HIRAM BLAIR

my mind when I got inter offis thet I 'd never use anythin' but blank catridges in my revolver. Course I did n't let nobody know this 'ceptin' you an' Joe, an' I never admitted even to Joe thet I wuz fool enuff to go into the Bad Lands with a toy pistol, but I had the kind of pride thet makes idjits out of men, an' I wud n't chuck it fer Buck an' his gang. I've quit thet foolishness sence.

"It wuz long 'bout seven in the evenin' when I druv up to the town house. The day wuz warm enuff fer people to loaf out doors, an' there wuz Buck, big ez life, with his gang all roun' him. I knowed I hed to git inter action quick, so I spoke up soon's I got outen the buggy an' hitched.

" 'Hello Buck! You 're back in Haw Township, I see.'

"Buck squirted 'bout half a pint of tobacco juice into the hog waller under the hitch rack an' drawled:

" 'Yes, Sheriff, I 'm back, an' back to stay.'

"I spoke kinder peaceful like: 'Sorry, Buck, but the Gran' Jury's got diff'runt idees 'bout thet, an' they hev give me orders to board you fer

THE ARREST OF BUCK JACKSON

a while. I come down to give you a invite to be my comp'ny fer a few weeks until Court meets ag'in.'

"Then they all laffed ez if that wuz a awful funny joke. I laffed, too, fer there wuz n't no use gittin' mad. They wuz good natured, an' so wuz I up to that time. Buck snorted:

" 'Much obleeged, Sheriff, but I calkilate to stay hyar, an' ef you know when you 're well off, you 'll git back inter your buggy an' drive ter town ez fast ez thet air plug kin tote you.'

"My hoss wuz a good one, Walt, an' it kinder riled me to hev Buck call him a plug, so I made up my mind not to fool any longer. I wuz standin' clost to the house, with all of Buck's gang on one side of me, an' betwixt me an' the buggy. In a second I hed Buck kivered with my toy pistol an' spoke, quiet an' easy:

" 'Buck, I wuz 'lected to be Sheriff of this whole keounty, Bad Lands an' all. I'd jest ez soon be dead ez to hev it said I cud n't do my duty, or thet I wuz a coward. Nobody won't ever 'cuse you of bein' a coward, an' it ain't goin' to do no harm to your repytashun to climb inter thet buggy an' go to town with me. Ef I leave

HIRAM BLAIR

here without you, my repytashun's ruined. Now you air either goin' with me, or you air goin' to hev a bullet through your heart. An' ef any of your friends roun' here butts in, he will be in a wuss place than the Bad Lands jest ez soon's I kin pull the trigger. You fellers kin kill me ef you try, but while you're doin' it, there's six good loads in this here gun, an' I hain't never missed a shot yit!

"That tuk them so much by surprise, Walt, thet not a coyote in that hull pack pulled a gun. Buck jest stood there lookin' like a fool an' me kiverin' him with my turr'ble lookin' counterfit arsenal. I hed to hold my advantage, so I kep' on.

"'Buck, you git inter that buggy, an' tell one of your friends to onhitch, an' you take the lines.'

"I hed him cowed then, an' he did jest what I tol' him. I jumped inter the buggy 'longside of Buck, still keepin' him kivered an' we druv out of Bad Lands leavin' the sorest lot of bad men I ever see."

It was now nearly train time. Hiram and Walter prepared to go to the station and as they

THE ARREST OF BUCK JACKSON

walked down the quiet streets Hiram gave Walter the moral of his story:

"Walt, ef Buck an' his gang had knowed them was blank catridges in my wicked lookin' gun, they 'd hev chucked me inter the hog waller. In polyticks you kain't use blanks. The other fellers will find it out. You 've got to hev good ammynyshun an' plenty of it. These here reformers in polyticks air jest like my toy pistol — they make ez much noise ez the fellers thet does things, p'r'aps more, but they don't hurt none."

"You were extremely foolhardy and reckless in that exploit, Hiram," soberly replied Walter. "It was nothing but foolish pride that led you to go among those ruffians with no loads in your revolver. It is not only foolish but criminal for a man needlessly to place his life in jeopardy just to establish a reputation for bravery. The silly notion that it is a great thing to be called 'game' sends more men, and women, too, to ruin than all other agencies of evil in the world."

"Walt, my boy, don't you see thet what I hed ter do wuz to make them Bad Lands toughs *think* I 'd kill some of them ef they ever started after me, an' a pistol loaded with blank catridges

HIRAM BLAIR

looks jest ez fierce an' hez the same effect on a feller's mind ez the real artickle, so long's they think it's loaded. Ef I could n't scare 'em I could n't do no good. S'posin' one of them boys hed ben reckless enuff to draw his gun with me kiverin' Buck with mine, an' my eye on all of 'em. He'd a ben clost enuff to me to put a bullet clean through my heart, even ef I'd shot Buck, fer them Bad Lands boys shoot a darn sight straighter than they act. An' would I ben any the less dead ef I'd plunked a few of them? No, my boy, when I start fer the nex' world, I want ter be in better comp'ny than thet, fer a man may be jedged by the comp'ny he's in over there ez well's here."

"Hiram, you certainly are a philosopher. Here's my train. Good-bye and God bless you."

"Good-bye, Walt; don't let them tell you they're out of Senate Journals, an' remember I'll meet you with a buggy at Johnsonville — an' say, Walt, one thing more —"

Walter was swinging on to the platform. He turned on the first step.

"What is that, Hi?"

THE ARREST OF BUCK JACKSON

"Don't fergit thet when a man's growed up full size, his troubles ain't never ez big ez his duty."

"I hope I may be able to make myself realize that." Walter was gone on his mission and Hiram stood looking sadly after the fast disappearing train.

"Poor boy," he muttered half savagely. "It's a great pity fer a feller to hev a heart too big fer the part he's got to play. Well, all I hope is thet ef he hez any bad dreams on his way to Indynapolis, he'll see a Bad Lands desperado tryin' to shoot him through the heart ruther then a purty girl cryin' her eyes out 'cause he's in polyticks."

CHAPTER XLI

THE EXHILARATING INFLUENCE OF POLITICS

A POLITICAL trip to the State capital in the midst of a national campaign when the political pot is at the boiling point, is an exhilarating experience to the man who enjoys the game of politics. It has the same effect on the natural politician as scoring for a race does on the spirited race horse. Every nerve and every mental energy is put on a tension. New life and vigor is infused into one. The men one meets are intent on politics and all are supremely confident that whatever they are for is bound to win. The very air is surcharged with a cheerful optimism which forbids moroseness or despair.

Thoughts of the possibility of misfortune or defeat cannot find a place in this all-pervading cheerfulness. Hypnotism may be an unknown art from a scientific standpoint, but it is a simple

THE INFLUENCE OF POLITICS

thing compared to this omnipresent and omniscient influence of the campaign gatherings at political headquarters. Faith is the foundation upon which political castles are laid, hope forms the materials with which they are constructed, and confidence completes and equips the structures for their intended use.

It was into this atmosphere of cheerfulness and good feeling that Walter walked on Thursday morning when he entered the lobby of the Denison Hotel at Indianapolis. Many of the men he met he knew either by sight or personally, and most of them knew that a warm contest was on in Douglas County for the control of Hinckley's Congressional district. The great majority of the Democratic politicians in Indiana at this time were friends and acquaintances of Hinckley and hoped for his return to Congress, though they were too diplomatic to express such a desire to Walter.

Within a short time he was irresistibly drawn into the spirit of the hour and to his great surprise, found that he was actually enjoying himself. It had not seemed possible a few hours before that he could ever have a moment when

HIRAM BLAIR

his great sorrow would not be with him, but here he was laughing and joking with the jovial spirits of the capital, and making a "good fellow" of himself with an ease that was incomprehensible. Walter did not understand it, but he was too much engrossed in the whirl of politics to take time to analyze his own feelings, so he simply drifted with the tide.

The exhilarating influences of the day did much to lift from Walter's mind the depressing cloud that had hung over it since his break with Florence. The hypnotic spell of political life, behind which ambition plays upon the strings, had taken such a hold on him that he was looking into the future with a feeling akin to cheerfulness. It was a master stroke of genius in Hiram persuading him to go to Indianapolis at the crucial moment when he was so near to yielding to Florence's importunities that he should forsake politics.

With his rare insight into human nature, a gift natural to him, Hiram had understood what was necessary to bring Walter back into cordial enthusiasm for the work of the campaign, and he had sent him on this mission more for its effect

THE INFLUENCE OF POLITICS

on him than for the practical results of the use of the Senate Journals.

The virus of political ambition had entered Walter's blood as he mingled with the men who sit in the seats of the mighty, and he was fired with a desire for power and fame. His flagging interest in the campaign was revived. While he had been for several days following the fortunes of Houston from a sense of duty and obligation, he was now inspired with a desire to do things in politics for himself. Ambition works through the selfish or baser nature of man, and as it is brought into more active play the finer sensibilities are made to perform a minor part in the game of life.

Walter Crane did not love Florence Bassett less, but in his present state of mind he felt that he was justified in resenting her attempt to swerve him from what he considered his duty. Having chosen his course he busied his mind in finding reasons for his choice. Ambition took on the guise of duty in whispering to his willing ear that he must allow nothing to interfere with his pursuit of the career which promised to lead to power and distinction.

HIRAM BLAIR

In this frame of mind he applied himself with energy to the task laid out for him by the caucus.

With two seats thrown together on the return train surrounded by documents and copies of the Journal Walter gave himself up wholly to the work, paying no attention to the curious glances of his fellow passengers. So busily engrossed was he that after two hours' work he did not look up until he had carefully marked a page of the Journal when he heard a musical voice beside him.

"Good afternoon, Mr. Crane."

When he did look up he was startled. Rose Jenkins stood in the aisle holding out her hand in greeting and beaming on him her most friendly smile.

"Why, Rose, I'm glad to see you, but where in the world did you come from?"

There was just a tinge of annoyance in his voice, denoting a wish to be left to finish his work and to avoid taking up time with explanations. Rose detected this and laughed.

"I came up here on purpose to see you, and to show you that I can be your good fairy. I'm going to sit right down here without an invitation

THE INFLUENCE OF POLITICS

and help you with your work. That is what I came for."

"That is awfully kind of you, Rose, but I don't know whether you can help me. I'm nearly through."

"Oh, I know I can help you. I often help papa when he is looking up authorities, and I'm sure I'd like to be private secretary to some great man, as you will be some day. Papa told me this morning how they had imposed an almost impossible task on you, and I begged him to let me come up here, meet the train, and help you. Then I must talk to you about Florence. But not until we have finished our work. Papa did n't like the idea at first, but I insisted that I am just dying to do something in this campaign which means so much to all of us, and at last he consented. Mamma agreed to meet me at the train in New Boston this evening. You are to get off at Johnsonville, and I am to take the books to New Boston. Now tell me what you want me to do first."

Rose proved an efficient assistant, and it was not long until all the copies of the Journal were marked and tied up in the original package ready

HIRAM BLAIR

for delivery to the men who were to take them out over the county in the morning.

"Now, Mr. Crane, I will talk to you about Florence," Rose began abruptly. "I was over to see her this morning and know all about it."

"I hope she is not feeling badly."

"That is always the way with men. They have so many things to take up their time and distract their attention, trouble never seems to affect them like it does women. You have been busy all day with affairs that give you excitement while poor Florence has to remain at home and bear her sorrow and heartache alone. The world has never given women a fair show since Adam accused Eve of tempting him with the apple."

Rose was unused to philosophizing and she was obliged to stop for breath.

"That may be true, Rose, but I am sure I sincerely wish Florence to have just as little trouble as is possible."

"Then you must go to her the first thing to-morrow morning and make it all up with her. You will have to make the advances, for Florence is so proud and strong-willed she cannot."

"To-morrow is impossible, Rose; I must be in

THE INFLUENCE OF POLITICS

Morrison to-morrow to meet some quite important engagements. Some of them were for to-day, and I was obliged to telegraph asking the parties to wait until to-morrow. The primaries are only a little more than a week off now. There is no help for it; I must be in Morrison to-morrow and Saturday. Next Sunday is the first day I can see Florence."

"Every day means more trouble for you and for her, Walter. Florence is a loyal, generous-hearted girl, but she has such an exalted idea of devotion to duty she cannot be swerved from her convictions like other girls. She is not in the least angry at you, as I would be after last night. She has thought it all out in her own way and she does not blame you as any other girl would, for your ill-tempered and unreasonable accusation. At the moment it cut her to the quick, as it was so unexpected. It was the first time you had ever said a disagreeable thing to her, and it was such a shock that she became on the instant thoroughly angry. But now she has found an excuse for you, as a woman who loves a man always will. She believes you were sincere and honest in what you said, and that perhaps from your

HIRAM BLAIR

point of view you had some right to resent her demands upon you."

"Then why is it going to be so hard for us to make up? I know I made an idiot of myself in being angry at Florence, and will be only too glad to tell her so and ask her forgiveness."

"If she was still angry, that would make it easy, Walter. When a woman is in love her anger is never dangerous. But the trouble is that Florence believes she loves you so much more than you love her that marriage would not bring happiness to either one of you. The sooner you see her the easier it will be to make her change her mind."

"I don't see how a few days can make such a great difference."

"Oh, I can't explain it to you at all. Florence is so much more intellectual than I am that I am all in a maze when she talks to me and tells me the wonderful ideas which run through her brain. She thinks her great love for you would make her demand too much from you, and that she would be jealous of your friends, even of your career, because they would take up so much of your time when she would want you for herself.

THE INFLUENCE OF POLITICS

Florence has a whole lot of that sort of notions and somebody who is brighter than I am will have to talk her out of them."

"Do you think Florence really believes the stories they have told her about me?"

"Not in the least," Rose waxed indignant. "She does n't credit anything they have told her, though she did say she was afraid of the temptations of a political life for an open-hearted, generous young man. It is not that at all. But her mother is a great trial to Florence. She has been influenced by the gossips and by the vicious New Boston prejudice until she really believes Florence would be going to certain ruin if she married you. Mrs. Bassett is not a strong woman, as Florence is, so does not try to influence Florence by talking to her, but when she wants her to do anything she cries and is threatened with one of her spells, then Florence usually does whatever her mother asks.

"Mrs. Bassett has been on the verge of hysteria all this week, but this morning when I was over she was much better. She knew the engagement was broken. You can see what a terrible time Florence has, and how much harder

HIRAM BLAIR

this trouble is for her to bear than it is for you."

"Does Florence know you came up here to meet me?"

"No, I did n't know you had gone to Indianapolis until after I was there this morning, and I did n't have time to say anything to her about it after I made up my mind to come."

"Then you had best not tell her. She might misunderstand it, especially as I will not be able to see her until Sunday. I think I can explain everything so that we will have no more trouble. Mrs. Bassett will become reconciled as soon as the primary is over and the New Boston people quit abusing me."

"You must not think it is Mrs. Bassett that is the great trouble. It is Florence herself. She is so terribly intellectual and high-spirited she does n't take life as the rest of us girls do. When she was through talking to me this morning I just up and told her she was stubborn, headstrong, and unreasonable, and that no girl has a higher duty than to marry the man she loves if he loves her.

"Then what do you suppose she did? She

THE INFLUENCE OF POLITICS

pulled me into her arms and we both had a good long cry. When her tears were dried, she said piteously, 'Rose, dear, let's not talk about it any more; you don't understand me. I don't know that I understand myself.' And that is what you will have to do, Walter; you must make Florence understand herself."

"Johnsonville the next stop," shouted the brakeman. Walter prepared to leave the train. He clasped Rose's hand warmly in parting, and in a voice husky with emotion, said:

"Rose, you have done me a favor I can never repay, but will always appreciate. You have shown me a new light, and have saved me from myself. I hope to profit by your kind, generous advice. Please see Florence as often as you can and brighten her life as much as you can. I will write to her, but cannot see her before Sunday. Good-bye."

Innocent, artless Rose! Little did she realize that by her effort to clear away the clouds that hung over her two friends she was the innocent cause of a storm which would rage around them all with increased ferocity and danger to their happiness.

CHAPTER XLII

FLORENCE HEARS OF ROSE'S TRIP

MRS. CORNSTUBBLE finished up her household work with rapidity on the morning after Walter's trip to Indianapolis. She had a load on her mind she felt she must relieve herself of at the earliest opportunity. Mrs. Cornstubble knew in her own mind that she would not gossip for the world, but she was positive she had a duty to perform that called for immediate action, and it led her steps to the Bassett's just as soon as she had rushed through with her morning work in that slipshod fashion common to gadding house-keepers.

Mrs. Bassett received her, but Florence had caught sight of the unwelcome visitor as she came up the front walk, and fled to her room.

Mrs. Cornstubble wasted but little time on commonplaces before plunging into the subject uppermost in her mind.

FLORENCE HEARS OF ROSE'S TRIP

"And what do you think, Mrs. Bassett, that bold little minx, Rose Jenkins, did yesterday? The whole town is shocked about it, and they do say there's talk of having a committee wait on her pa. You don't say you haven't heard it?"

"I hadn't heard of Rose doing anything unusual," wearily replied Mrs. Bassett; "she visited Florence yesterday forenoon."

"Yes, and it was only a little while afterward that she went right down to the depot in broad daylight and got on the train and went to Pittsfield and met that abandoned wretch of a Morri-son lawyer who had gone to Indianapolis to do some dirty work against Senator Hinckley. The brazen creature just flopped herself down in the seat with him and rode all the way to Johnsonville, helping him with some work he was doing and making an exhibition of herself all the way. Sarah Skates was on the train and saw them, but they were too busy with one another to even notice her. He left the train at Johnsonville and Rose came on home. It was more than an hour after dark when the train got into New Boston."

Mrs. Bassett was intensely interested but did

HIRAM BLAIR

not like to encourage Mrs. Cornstubble's gossip. She could not refrain from baiting her further, however.

"I always thought that Rose Jenkins was a very well-behaved girl, and I am surprised to hear that she would commit an indiscretion. Are you sure she went to Pittsfield to meet Mr. Crane?"

"There's not fifteen minutes between the time of the up-train and the down at Pittsfield and she could n't have left the depot. What business would a young girl like Rose Jenkins have going up there on one train and right back on another if it was n't to meet some man? If she had any good reason for going up there on a flying trip like that, she would have told you and Florence about it when she was here only a little while before."

"Who met her at the train when she came back? I heard that her father was out in the country."

"That's the strangest part of it all. Her mother was at the train and went home with Rose, and nobody knows whether she was fooled or they're so prejudiced against Senator

FLORENCE HEARS OF ROSE'S TRIP

Hinckley that they are willing to condone anything that is done by people who are fighting him."

Mrs. Cornstubble stopped to give Mrs. Bassett a chance to say something, but Mrs. Bassett knew her too well to gratify her curiosity. Her silence did not please Mrs. Cornstubble.

"And Rose did n't say a word to you or Florence about going on that trip? Now does n't that prove what I said, that she did n't have a good purpose in going? It's a terrible thing that our young boys and girls are growing up so different from their parents. No telling what the world is coming to. I thought maybe you knew something that might throw a different light on the thing and I'm awfully sorry you don't."

Mrs. Bassett still maintained silence remarkable for her under this pressure and Mrs. Cornstubble gave up the struggle.

"Well, I must be going; I did n't really have time to come over this morning, but I was so anxious to know if you and Florence could explain this thing so it would n't look so bad for Rose, that I just forced myself to run over."

Mrs. Bassett's silence before Mrs. Cornstubble

HIRAM BLAIR

was made up for by exceeding volubility when Florence came in. She repeated all that the village gossip had said, and added her own opinion concerning the escapade, which was by no means favorable either to Rose or Walter.

Florence heard her through without a word. When she had said all she could think of, Florence replied wearily:

"Mother, dear, you must not judge harshly when all you have heard is rumor. Mr. Crane is a gentleman whom we have frequently received in our home. We should have too much respect for ourselves to accept as true attacks upon his character unless they are proven positively. As for Rose, she is my dearest and truest friend. I cannot believe that she has done a wilfully wrong act."

In the privacy of her room Florence found it much less easy to dismiss from her mind the subject of Rose's trip. Knowing only what her mother had repeated to her of Mrs. Cornstubble's story, she was too proud to make inquiries, yet she could not understand why Rose should meet Walter on the train the day after they had quarrelled, and a short time after leaving

FLORENCE HEARS OF ROSE'S TRIP

her, without having even mentioned the fact that he had gone to Indianapolis. She remembered that Walter had not spoken of going to Indianapolis when he was with her the night before, but she excused that on the plea that in his excitement he might easily have forgotten it.

But Rose was in full and thorough sympathy with Walter's political work. In all their heart talks, Rose had stoutly defended Walter, and had insisted that Florence should not dissuade him from continuing the fight against Hinckley. Florence was unable to keep the thought out of her mind that Rose could so much more easily submerge herself and her inclinations in the desire that Walter should succeed in the course he had laid out, while her own convictions,— or were they prejudices,— would insist upon rising to combat her heart's desire that he should win. With that self-disparagement so common to persons of strong will and stout hearts, she argued to herself that Rose was much better suited to help Walter make a career for himself than she. And the thought kept rising to harass her, what if Walter was thinking the same thing? How could he avoid thinking so when she braved the

HIRAM BLAIR

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HIRAM BLAIR

scorn of New Boston and boldly went to help him in his political work? How and when had they arranged the meeting? Why did not Rose tell her she was going to meet and help him?

At first Florence resolved to see Rose at once and ask her about her trip, believing she would tell her all. Then her pride got the better of her. To herself she said, "No, Rose will tell me if she wishes me to know. I trust her, and will not say one word to her on the subject. Rose would not deceive me nor be in the slightest degree false. I will think no more of what these meddling gossips are saying, and I will not say a word to Rose unless she mentions it. All is over between Walter and me, and I am not concerned in his movements."

Her resolve did not restrain her from coming to the conclusion in half an hour that she needed a walk. "I must get out! Fresh air will do me good. I am staying cooped up in the house too much." She put on her hat and jacket and started briskly down the walk. At the gate she hesitated. To the left was a shaded country road, quiet, cool, and pleasant. Many a time she and Walter had lingered happily along the path

FLORENCE HEARS OF ROSE'S TRIP

under the shade of the friendly, sympathetic trees and exchanged soft words of love or made joyous plans for the future. Florence gazed wistfully and tenderly up the inviting lane and turned as if to walk in that direction.

"No, I do not need solitude to-day. I will meet the people who are on the street. I will not be a coward."

So she turned toward the village and in due course was in front of Rose Jenkins' home. Rose saw her, and running out greeted Florence with affectionate tenderness, and begged her to come in. "I will tell you about the Houston meeting last night. Papa was there and he says it was the best meeting they have had in all the campaign. He says now he feels really quite positive Mr. Houston will be nominated unless they buy up a great many of his supporters. Papa and Mr. Blair left early this morning for the western part of the county, and Walter Crane went home to stay the rest of the week. It's too dreadful, Florence, for you and he to have quarrelled at this time when you both are in so much trouble. I do wish I could do something to bring you together."

[871]

HIRAM BLAIR

"You are mistaken, Rose," sadly responded Florence, "in thinking that our little quarrel was the cause of our separation. It is simply that we are not suited to one another, and it is better for both of us that we part. Please let us talk about something else."

Throughout their talk, though Rose was bursting with the desire to tell Florence all about her trip, and what was said, she was true to her promise and did not mention it. Florence would not even hint that she knew of it. Had she done so, Rose could not have held her secret an instant but would have burst out with the whole story of how she had gone to Pittsfield to take Walter's message from Florence's heart if not from her lips. As it was they separated without Rose having discovered that Florence knew enough of the story to harass and distress her but not enough to lift the cloud of uncertainty which hung depressingly over her.

CHAPTER XLIII

IN THE THICK OF THE FIGHT

POETS and novelists would have us believe that love is wholly an emotion of the heart, and is therefore not governable by the unromantic influences of the mind. In order that the muse shall soar and the love-story sell, they find it necessary to locate the seat of love at such a distance from the brain that its actions shall not be circumscribed by the judgment. But practical and unsentimental scientists, regardless of the necessities of the poets and story writers, have unfeelingly demonstrated by indisputable proofs that love, as well as all other human emotions, is a function of the mind and that the seat of the mind is the brain, not the heart. They have proven, too, that the only right the heart has to claim credit as the love creating organ is that intense feeling of any nature,—anger, excitement or love,—causes the blood to flow with greater rapidity from the

HIRAM BLAIR

brain, and this sets the heart into quicker action. As it makes the demonstration it receives the credit for being the origin of the disturbance instead of only the palpable evidence of its existence. It was a cruel thing for the scientists to destroy thus an illusion cherished as fondly by grown-up people as is Santa Claus by the children, but your true scientist enjoys nothing so much as to demonstrate to the point of absolute certainty some proposition which will make him unpopular the rest of his days. So the scientists will not even hint at a compromise, and we are obliged to accept as truth the unwelcome idea that we must learn to love with the same faculties we employ in mastering the prosaic and unsentimental multiplication table.

So, when Walter Crane reached Morrison the morning after his trip to Indianapolis and found himself in the midst of a situation demanding quick and aggressive action, he threw himself into the work with an energy and directness intensified if at all affected by his bitter experiences of the past two days. Congressman Hinckley had sent lieutenants into Morrison amply supplied with money and the employés of the rail-

IN THE THICK OF THE FIGHT

road had been given quiet instruction from headquarters that they must not take an active part in the contest. This was endangering Houston's chances, as it was necessary that he should get every possible vote in Morrison to overcome the substantial majority conceded to Hinckley in the county outside of Morrison.

Walter at once called his forces together in his office and gave them hurried instructions. He also wired to Hiram to get into Morrison as soon as he could, and then he jumped into a buggy and drove from place to place, imploring some, threatening others, arguing with a few, and employing all the arts known to the practical politician, to get back the Houston men who had been won over by Hinckley's lieutenants.

He was so weary that when he went to his room near midnight he could hardly drag his feet up the steps, and when he did reach his room he threw himself on the bed without lighting the gas or removing his clothes. Lying there he reviewed the incidents of the day and a satisfying confidence of work well done filled his mind. The scattered remnants had been collected, his forces had been reorganized and infused with

HIRAM BLAIR

new spirit. He felt that Morrison could be depended on to do all he had promised Houston, and if there came into his musings a taint of disgust at the cost, this was overwhelmed in the pleasurable idea that victory was in sight.

Presently he roused himself and struck a light. As he did so his gaze fell on the package Florence had sent to him the day before. It was lying mutely on the dresser, a modest little package, but its presence wrought a great change in Walter. It brought him back to his misery with a great shock and drove out of his mind the contemplation of the progress of the day. Sitting down he took up the small package, and gazed at it long without opening it. Well he knew what it contained, for but few were the presents he had been able to send to Florence. At length he sprung to his feet and threw the package, still unopened on the dresser. Then he spoke aloud as if in protest to the box which was the material evidence of his loss:

"It shall not be; Florence loves me, that I know. I love her, and our enemies shall not separate us."

With this, leaving the unopened box still

IN THE THICK OF THE FIGHT

lying on the dresser as a silent witness of his resolve, Walter threw himself into bed and was soon in the embrace of that dreamless sleep which is the reward of exhausting mental and physical labor.

CHAPTER XLIV.

A DISAPPEARANCE

NATURE, capricious in her generosity, lavishes upon the month of June her most luxuriant caresses. A June day in Southern Indiana is full of the sweetness of early harvest. Fruits and flowers vie with one another in scattering broadcast upon the earth plenty and beauty. Fields of ripened grain nodding in the sunlight give promise of sustenance to hungry millions, and all Nature's handmaidens seem to be in a merry war to see which can do the most for mankind. On this June Sunday as Rose Jenkins walked demurely down the street on her way to church she looked upon a scene of wholesome splendor which should have filled her heart with joy in the privilege of living and of sharing in all the wealth of Nature's gracious favor.

But Rose did not seem to notice. Her eyes were downcast, and if one had been permitted to

A DISAPPEARANCE

lift the hat which shaded them, and glance directly into those sympathetic orbs, traces of recent tears might have been discovered. For Rose was carrying an aching heart within her breast and a despairing struggle with a hard problem in her mind. It was all caused by a little scrap of note paper lightly folded within the leaves of the Bible she was carrying as she slowly took her way to church. Only a few lines were hurriedly written on this inoffensive sheet of note paper, but they meant much of misery to Rose and others of our acquaintance.

What a world of sorrow has the art of writing brought upon us all! Yet is he most miserable who lacks the power to wield the pen.

Rose was suddenly conscious of a tall form blocking the path, even before she looked up. As she stopped, she exclaimed:

"Oh, Mr. Crane, is n't it terrible!"

"Yes, Rose; I can't make it out at all. I have just come from Florence's and there is no one at home. I went clear around the house, and knocked at every door. Do you know where she is?"

For answer Rose opened her Bible and handed

HIRAM BLAIR

Walter the sheet of note paper that had caused all her trouble. It read:

"Dear Rose: I am going away. Papa and mamma are with me. Am not brave enough to stand it here. Do not try to find out where we are for no one knows. Our stay will be for several weeks.

"FLORENCE."

Walter read it through with a haggard face, then looked inquiringly at Rose.

"This came to me last evening through the mail. Florence had mailed it on her way to the train. I did not see her yesterday. This morning early I hunted up Jane Ayers, their housemaid, and inquired where they had gone, but they had been careful not to tell her anything. All she knew was that they would be gone a long time, and she was to go to the house occasionally to keep it in order. The man who looks after the outdoor work does n't know any more."

"Did n't they leave any instructions with your father? He is looking after Mrs. Bassett's business affairs, is he not?"

"The only instructions papa received was a note in Florence's handwriting signed in Mrs.

A DISAPPEARANCE

Bassett's name, telling him to go on with their affairs just as if they were here and to hold all collections until they return."

"Then what am I to do? I must find Florence, I cannot let this go on as it is. You don't suppose they left any forwarding order for their mail, do you?"

"Not likely. The postmaster would n't tell you what it is, even if they did. You know, he is a citizen of New Boston, and considers it his patriotic duty to hate you."

"He is a Republican, and this is a Democratic quarrel."

"Not when New Boston and Morrison come into it. Both parties unite here when it comes to hating Morrison. But papa can find out if they have left a forwarding order. He is at home resting after his hard week's work. He tells me you made a splendid speech last night at Greensburg. Poor papa! They are making his life miserable, too. He dislikes quarrelling so much, and now nearly everybody in New Boston is trying to quarrel with him. Is there always so much wickedness in politics as there is in this campaign?"

HIRAM BLAIR

"I hope not, Rose. But I must try to find where Florence has gone. I'll go to the house and see if your father can give me any more information."

Leaving Rose to find what solace she could in her devotions, Walter hurried to Mr. Jenkins, and briefly explained his anxiety to know the destination of the Bassetts. Mr. Jenkins readily agreed to go to the postoffice and inquire if a forwarding order had been left. He bade Walter wait at the house for him, as he knew the postmaster would refuse the information if he knew who desired it.

Presently Mr. Jenkins returned with a blank look on his face and as blank a report from the postmaster. This gentleman had informed him that the Bassetts did not get much mail, and they had left no orders with him whatever. George Jenkins was too considerate of Walter's feelings to tell him that the postmaster had volunteered the additional remark: "Most of their mail lately has been to the girl, from Morrison, but I hear that's been stopped."

In his despair Walter could think of nothing

A DISAPPEARANCE

better than going to Hiram Blair to explain his troubles.

Hiram had just finished his breakfast and was still sitting in the dining-room in his shirt sleeves and stocking feet which were resting comfortably on the dining-room table while he was tilted back in his chair industriously smoking his cob pipe.

"Ben out kinder airly, hain't ye, boy? Any good news?" He grasped Walter's hand and motioned him to a chair without changing his position.

"Bad," gloomily replied Walter; "she's gone."

"Gone? Where?"

"That's the trouble — I don't know. Neither does any one else in New Boston."

"Whole fambly gone?"

"Yes, all of them. They left no word except she wrote Rose Jenkins she would be away several weeks."

"Well, that's a stunner, sure. She's a game one, and is dead set on givin' you a lively chase. But she can't stay away always, and you kain't do anything but wait till she comes back."

[388]

HIRAM BLAIR

"I can't wait."

"The last man I put in jail said to me, 'Sheriff, ef you put me in there, I 'll die shure.' I put him in just the same, and he 's still alive. You kin do anythin' you hev to do, an' this is one of them. That Bassett gal will keep, an' this campaign won't. She 's got more hoss sense than you hev. She 's took herself outen the keounty so 's there won't be any foolishness over her, an' so 's the gossips in New Bosting will hev some-thin' else to talk about than abusin' you an' me. I 'm thinkin' she 's done a right smart trick."

"But, Hiram, the dreadful uncertainty of it all."

"There ain't no uncertainty about it, my boy. When this primary is over an' we 've got Ol' Dave licked, your gal will come back, and you will be jest the same ez you wuz before this tear-up. All you 've got to do is to cut out this love bizness fer a week an' put in your best licks on the home-stretch of this race. You 'll be too busy to do much worryin'. Git a piece of paper, an' let 's figger up how the townships air goin'."

There appeared to be nothing else to do, and soon Hiram and Walter were deep in the cal-

A DISAPPEARANCE

culatation of their chances of carrying the county for Houston, discussing each township with great care and finally putting it down for either Hinckley or Houston by a majority they believed to be fair.

When they had finished, Hiram dropped back to the posture in which Walter had found him, and said:

"Now foot it up, leavin' out Morrison, an' see where we 're at."

In a few minutes Walter grimly announced: "It shows Hinckley four hundred and thirty-five ahead."

"Great guns! ez much ez thet? Kin you beat it?"

"My figures on Morrison show that we will certainly carry it by more than five hundred, possibly six."

Hiram breathed a sigh of relief.

CHAPTER XLV

RECEIVING THE RETURNS

THE primary was over. Hiram Blair, George Jenkins, Joe Simpson, and one or two other New Boston citizens whom Hiram had proselyted on the night before election were gathered in Jenkins' office to receive returns. They were quiet and serious, for the day had been a hard one. Hiram had greatly wished to put in the day at Morrison, but his presence there had not been considered necessary, and if he left New Boston no one with any qualities of leadership would be in the county-seat, the centre of the battle. So Hiram had finished the fight in the heart of the enemy's country. The overwhelming vote for Hinckley in New Boston and vicinity had a depressing effect on the few Houston men there. No satisfactory news had come from outside townships, but Hiram's experienced insight taught him that Hinckley had made a terrific fight. He realized, too, that the fierce

RECEIVING THE RETURNS

attack made upon him and Walter the last week of the campaign by Congressman Hinckley had had a telling effect. In several instances he had been coldly treated by farmers he had attempted to talk with concerning the campaign. He knew the fight was close, and that he could not estimate how far awry the onslaught of Hinckley had knocked their calculations. Jenkins was positively in the dumps. He had been buffeted about all morning by the Hinckley men who gave him no rest until he finally went into his office after dinner and did not stir from it until supper time. This left Hiram to battle the enemy single-handed, except for the few weak brothers whom Hinckley had failed to satisfy, and who had therefore offered their services to Hiram. He had taken them in more to worry the opposition than because he thought they would do Houston any good. Joe Simpson had gone to his home township as soon as the Hinckley party learned that he was really for Houston while pretending to be for Hinckley. He had returned to New Boston early in the evening, as soon as the vote of the township was all in, which was long before the time for the closing of the polls.

HIRAM BLAIR

They sat dismally in the office with the light turned low, saying but little. Across the street in Hinckley's office, a large and jubilant crowd was gathered. They were confident of victory, buoyed up by the heavy, one-sided vote in New Boston and the adjacent townships. Returns from these townships came in early and they were all favorable to Hinckley. Hiram looked out through the dingy window, silently smoking his faithful cob pipe. Presently when he had to take it out of his mouth to fill it, he suggested:

"Ol' Dave's havin' a good time now. Mebbe we'll hev ourn after a while."

"I fear not," was Jenkins' disconsolate response; "Hinckley never has been defeated. It might have been better for us all if we had not gone into this."

A dry smile flitted over Hiram's countenance, as he looked at Jenkins and drawled: "Hed some mighty important bizness in your offis all afternoon, did n't you, George?"

His pipe was refilled and he resumed his usual posture, his feet on the window sill, his chair tilted back, at a place where he could see the

RECEIVING THE RETURNS

crowd across the street, but could not be seen by them.

By the time Hiram had finished this pipe, couriers began coming in from outside townships bringing complete returns of the primary. These earlier returns were all in favor of Hinckley. Neither side would depend on the other's couriers, but had arranged for special messengers from all the towns off the railroad. As they came in, Hiram would mark the vote down on a slip of paper and compare them with the figures he and Walter had made the week before. Sometimes he would give a grunt of satisfaction, sometimes it would be a suppressed oath, according as the returns were better or worse than they had calculated. At the end of an hour of receiving returns and comparing them, he spoke for the first time, except to ask questions of the messengers.

“ ‘Cordin’ to Walt’s figgers made las’ Sunday we ’re not quite holdin’ our own in the townships thet hez come in, but them thet air to come in last air frum Sam’s home country, an’ I b’leeve we ’ve figgered low on ’em.”

HIRAM BLAIR

Just then a wild whoop of joy went up from the Hinckley headquarters, and there were loud shouts for Congressman Hinckley. He came out, mounted a dry goods box and began to harangue the crowd.

"They've got New Bosting official, an' Hinckley's nomynated," said Hiram softly. "Wait till they hear frum Morrison."

While Hinckley was talking, Sam Houston drove up, his horses wet and foaming, and rushed into the room. He was taken aback by the gloomy aspect of the room and those about him, as well as by the noisy demonstrations of joy in the Hinckley party, and demanded of Hiram:

"What's the matter, Hiram? I've got it, have n't I?"

"Ol' Dave's havin' his innin' now, Sam; yours is comin' when we hear frum Morrison. How'd your township go?"

"We polled one hundred and seventy votes, and fifteen scalawags voted for Hinckley, the scoundrels! I carried Haw Township, the Bad Lands, by eighty-seven."

"Thet comes frum Ol' Dave goin' down there an' tellin' 'em we're a gang of thieves and

RECEIVING THE RETURNS

drunkards. I thought that 'd fetch 'em. Them 's the kind of people they 're fer."

Hiram again compared the returns with the figures on his sheet, and walked over to the window. A long, low chuckle escaped him for the first time in the evening. It seemed to delight him to watch Hinckley talk. Then he took Houston to the table and explained to him that the returns from the two townships he had brought in were so far ahead of the figures he was depending on, that it put him ahead of Hinckley, provided the other townships held out according to the estimates.

Good news and bad continued to come. Morrison's vote was heavy and it had been decided in the closing days of the fight to have it all polled at one place so it could be the easier controlled and it would naturally be the last to come in. The jubilation of the Hinckley party was unabated; as the returns, good or bad, kept Hinckley's apparent lead over Houston above four hundred, and no one in New Boston dreamed that Houston could carry Morrison by any such figure as that. Along about eleven o'clock Hiram announced:

HIRAM BLAIR

"All the townships air in but Morrison, an' we kin figger purty safe. Walt's estimate here gives Hinckley four hundred an' thirty-five outside of Morrison. He has actilly got four hundred an' sixty-seven. Walt guaranteed me he 'd carry Morrison by more 'n thet, an' I feel ez if Houston wuz jest ez good ez nomynated."

"Hev you telygrafted to him how many we need?" ventured Joe Simpson.

"Joe," Hiram sternly replied, "you don't know the boy, or you would n't ask thet question."

Then noting a shade of disappointment and chagrin come over Joe's face he added quietly:

"Besides, Joe, these is Walt's own figgers."

Joe looked relieved, and Hiram knew that his confidence in the infallibility of Walter had not been shattered.

The others were unable to share Hiram's confidence. It was a long lead to overcome, and they were naturally disheartened by the steady pouring in of Hinckley's returns, and by the continued hilarity of the Hinckley clans on the opposite side of the street. After Hinckley's speech he had invited all hands to Flanagan's and ordered him to let everybody have what he

RECEIVING THE RETURNS

wanted. Thus inspired, a gang of Hinckleyites had gathered in front of Jenkins' office and repeatedly howled a jargon of song some one had improvised under the influence of Flanagan's liquor. It ran:

"Sam Houston's a good old man,
But Sam has joined a bad, bad clan,
And Congressman he'll never be,
For there's a hole in the bottom of the sea."

The serenaders put enough energy and persistence into their efforts to make up for the lack of music in their song. Except for occasional recesses taken to repair to Flanagan's and wet their dried-out vocal organs, this song was sung incessantly to the intense disgust of Houston and everybody else in his headquarters, except Hiram. He appeared to enjoy it hugely and every little while he would let out a low chuckle as the noisy Hinckleyites gave vent to their joy. He soon joined in the general disgust, however, for the reason that after an unusually prolonged stay in Flanagan's the singers came back with a verse added to their doggerel:

"Hiram Blair is sly as a fox,
Him and Crane got Houston's rocks,

[398]

HIRAM BLAIR

But they are dead ones all agree,
For there's a hole in the bottom of the sea."

Just then a telegraph messenger boy came running in with a message for Hiram. He opened it, grunted, then dropped his feet on the floor, at the same time raising the window so he could look out on the crowd. His sudden appearance at the window caught the attention of the crowd and they were still within a moment after he had raised his hand for silence.

"Gentillmen of New Bosting: I thank you fer this honor, an' fer the fine music you've ben so kind ez to give us. It takes me back to the ol' days on the farm in the evenin's when the cows come in bawlin' fer their feed and I always enjoy anythin' thet brings back ol' times. Sence you boys hev ben so kind to me, I'll be ekally ez nice to you, an' tell you how the primary has went. I hev a telygram frum Morrison here sayin' how she went and I hev in my hand the figgers on the rest of the keounty; outside of Morrison Dave Hinckley hez four hundred and sixty-seven more votes than Sam Houston, an' this telygram reads this-a-way:

[394]

RECEIVING THE RETURNS

“‘HIRAM BLAIR,

“ ‘*New Bosting, Ind.*

“ ‘Morrison complete, Houston seven hundred eighty-six. Hinckley one hundred ninety.

“ ‘WALTER CRANE.’

“Gentillmen, thet gives Sam Houston a majority of five hundred an’ ninety-six in Morrison an’ one hundred an’ twenty-nine clean over Dave in the hull keounty. Now, won’t you boys please sing thet song to me ag’in?”

Hiram turned to find himself in the centre of an excited and happy company. They showered their congratulations on Houston and him, but Hiram himself was calm. He filled his pipe again, lighted it, and then turning to Houston, remarked:

“Sam, you’ve done a thing nobody in the keounty, not even me, thought could be did. Now go home an’ tell your wife thet in six months she’ll be Mrs. Congrissman Houston, an’ thet she hez Walter Crane an’ one other party I ain’t goin’ to name, to thank for it.”

To the others he continued:

“Boys, nothin’ is quite so hard to bear ez to

HIRAM BLAIR

hev a thing clinched like our friends across the street, an' then to lose it. They'll be sore ez boils in the mornin'. Ol' Dave owes mos' of these storekeepers, and he mus' hev run a good bill at Flanagan's in the three hours he wuz Congrissman ag'in. They'll all be turr'bly outraged when they come to an' find out what hez happened to 'em so we want to treat 'em jes' ez easy ez we kin. Don't rawhide 'em, but every feller jes' go 'bout his bizness ez if nothin' hed happened."

As they started to leave Jenkins' office the party was surprised to see Walter Crane hurrying toward them. His clothes were dirty and torn, his hat crushed and his face and hands showed several bruises. Rushing up, Hiram grasped him by his good hand and cried:

"Gosh, Walt! How in the world did you git here, an' what hev they ben doin' to you? You sure look like you'd ben through a threshing machine."

"Oh, that's nothing. I'm used to that sort of thing now," replied Walter as he stepped into the room and began brushing his clothes. "After the count of the vote was over I felt that

RECEIVING THE RETURNS

I could n't stay away from you folks so I jumped on the late train and came over."

"But it don't stop here," Hiram interrupted.

"No; that is the reason I'm disfigured. I bought a ticket for Mitchell, hoping that I would be able to talk the conductor into slowing down here, so I could drop off. But when I got aboard I found the conductor is a strong Hinckley man and I would n't say anything to him. When the train came into New Boston I went back to the rear platform and pulled the bell-cord. As I was dropping off a brakeman came running back to see what was the trouble and when he discovered that I had pulled the bell-cord to stop the train, he helped me off with his foot. I had to protect my bad arm and fell rather heavily on my right side. I guess I'm not much hurt."

"Well, the best you git is a guess, my boy," said Hiram; "I ain't goin' to take no chances lettin' a New Bosting doctor at you this night. Ef there is any such thing as what you lawyers call justifiable homercide they'd give you a dose of it to-night. You come along with me an' let me put you to bed before any New Bosting feller sees you."

HIRAM BLAIR

The next day Walter did not get out of bed. He was rather badly shaken up by his fall from the train, and the strain of the campaign had overtaxed his strength. Late in the day Hiram went to his room and recounted the incidents of the day.

"Walt, I hain't left the place all day. I let Susan go to church by herself, ez usual, but cautioned her pertiklar to go to Hinckley's church an' see how they all looked. Sent Joe Simpson to the postoffice after the mail. He come back before my wife did, and he wuz laffin', after he got inside the house, not before. He sez:

" 'Hiram, I've jest turned down three pres-sin' invitashuns to fight, an' ef I'd stayed on the streets two minits longer, the Sabbith would hev ben desecrated, sure. They air all convinced thet some sort of crime hez ben committed, but they's a diff'runce of opinyun ez to jest what the crime is. Some sez grand larseny, some sez obtainin' votes under false pretences, an' some sez rape of the people's rights; but they all agree thet the vote in Morrison wuz crooked, an' thet it wuz held back until you found out how many wuz needed down there to nomynate Houston.

RECEIVING THE RETURNS

They 's some talk of ridin' you outen the keounty on a rail, but not ez much, quite, ez I expected.'

"This made me feel mighty good, Walt; after all the abuse they 'd heaped on you an' me; but I wuz n't satisfied yit, so I asked Joe ef he hed seed Ol' Dave.

" 'B'ilin' drunk, an' gittin' wuss,' sez Joe. 'He went home loaded to the guards las' night before the Morrison vote come in, an' they put him to bed a Congrissman. This mornin' he woke up a private citizen, but with a head big enuff fer two Congrissmen. All the wimmen in the house wuz cryin', an' Dave could n't stan' thet, so he come down to his office, an' drank up mos' of the 'lection whiskey thet wuz left over. It wuz the fightin' kind, an' sence he filled up on it, he 's ben hangin' to Fred Laswell's cigar store Injin, cussin' everybody an' telling 'em he 'd carry the fight to the deestriect convention, an' be nomy-nated anyhow, an' thet he 's goin' to hev the law on you an' Walt Crane. He abused pore George Jenkins tell he run away like a hound pup, an' when I passed by, on the other side of the street, he called out, "Hey there, Judas! hev you got yore thirty pieces of silver yet?" I did n't pay no

HIRAM BLAIR

attention to him, but ef one of them invitashuns to fight hed come right then, there 'd sure ben some fightin' done!' Joe told a heap more like that about the goin's on, but what I 've repeated is the mos' interestin' part of it.

"After that," chuckled Hiram, "I did n't need no informashun frum my wife, an' did n't git none. All she sed wuz: 'Mrs. Hinckley an' the girls wuz to church. They 'd ben cryin', and I 'm sorry fer 'em an' I don't care what you say.' Then she rushed out inter the kitchen an' begun to git dinner."

"Do you think any of them will make you any trouble, Hiram?" inquired Walter anxiously.

"You 've seed these little fyste dogs thet run along inside the fence an' bark like mad at you, long's you 're passin' their yard, hain't you, Walt? Then when you open the gate an' go after 'em they run howlin' under the house and begin barkin' ag'in. Well, thet 's the way with these New Bosting bullies. They won't do a thing to me 'cause I 'm able bodied an' they know I 'm purty tol'able certain to be able to take keer of myself. I 'd hate to see 'em git a good chanst

RECEIVING THE RETURNS

at you in the shape you 're in now, but ez soon 's you git repaired up, you 'll be all right."

"I must get out to-morrow," sighed Walter, "and go find Florence."

"My boy, you 'd best wait for her to come back. She 's bound to come, an' now thet Hinckley is beat, all your troubles air over. You 'd better git back to Morrison an' go to practisin' law. It 's purty tough on a soft-hearted boy like you to git into all this mess, but it 'll do you good in the long run. More 'n that, you 'd better wait till you look a heap better than you do now before you see your gal, or you mought hev to ask fer an interduction."

The next morning Walter got out, weak and trembling, but determined to return to Morrison. Hiram insisted that he must not leave so soon, but Walter would not be persuaded.

"Let me drive you over. 'Tain't awful safe fer you to go through these streets to the train."

"Much obliged, Hiram, but I 've done nothing more than my duty and I 'm not afraid."

"Well, then, Walt, bein' ez you ain't afeerd, Joe an' me will walk down to the deepo with you,

HIRAM BLAIR

'cause we both feel kinder skairt ourselves an' it does chirp up a feller a heap when he 's feelin' a mite shaky to be with a boy what's got the courage."

Walter looked at him with a weary smile playing about his lips, but made no further protest.

The station waiting-room was full of people and was close and stuffy. Walter had been in it only a few minutes when he fell forward in his chair and was only stopped from falling prostrate on the floor by Hiram catching him. Still refusing to call a New Boston doctor, Hiram directed Joe to assist him and they got Walter on to the train for Morrison, Hiram going with him.

That night Walter was in his room at Mrs. Dougherty's in a raging delirium of brain fever.

CHAPTER XLVI

ROSE JENKINS GETS A LETTER

A FEW days after the primary, Rose Jenkins was treated to a great surprise. She received a bulky letter postmarked Cincinnati. Having no friends there from whom she might receive a letter, she was greatly mystified until she observed that the superscription was in the handwriting of Florence Bassett. The letter gave not the slightest intimation where Florence was, but informed Rose that she was living quietly in the country with her father and mother, and that her mother's health was much improved.

The letter breathed a spirit of resignation but also of determination not to renew her engagement with Walter. Florence did not pretend that she had ceased to love him, but declared that her love for him was so great and her prejudices so strong that she feared she would make demands upon him which would either impair his

HIRAM BLAIR

usefulness as a public man or cause her unhappiness through his seeming neglect. The letter was of great length, and in it Florence explained that in her anxiety to know the events of the last days of the primary campaign, she had prevailed on her father to secure the services of a reporter for one of the large city papers to report the primary for her benefit. Colonel Bassett having an acquaintance with the managing editor, had persuaded him to send an experienced political reporter into Douglas County with instructions to write up the campaign for the newspaper. The reporter did not know that his report was not to be published, but the article was sent to Colonel Bassett just as it was written.

In the reporter's story occurred this passage:

"Congressman Hinckley made his fatal mistake in failing at an earlier day to take care of Walter Crane, the young lawyer of Morrison, who by the shrewd exercise of the talents of the practical politician has become the boss of the Democratic party in Morrison. He, it was, who turned the vote of the metropolis of the county almost solidly for Houston, a plain old farmer. Left to himself the honest corn-fed yeoman

ROSE GETS A LETTER

would never have made a break in the vote of the railroad town of Morrison. But he was not left to himself. His visits to Morrison were as few and as short as Crane could have them. Houston was not permitted to canvass Morrison, except some good man was with him, and he was always called to the country on important business before he had been in Morrison many hours. Crane is an astute politician of the practical school, and his friend the County Sheriff, Hiram Blair, can go him several degrees better on the practical side. When Hinckley's lieutenants made a substantial break in the saloon vote by the judicious use of money, the Mayor, Crane's man, promptly began to enforce the law on the offending saloons, and they came back into line for Houston. It was the same with the railroads. Hinckley has always been known in the Legislature as the friend of the railroads, and the head officials of the roads with employes voting in Morrison sought to influence the men in his favor. Crane's magic wand was waved again, and the city administration began a vigorous enforcement of the city ordinances covering the speed of trains running through the city limits,

HIRAM BLAIR

the blocking of crossings and such things. The activity of railroad men for Hinckley soon ceased. Morrison's laboring men gave the close-fisted farmer who believes a dollar a day is a high wage for a workingman, proportionately as large a majority as Hinckley's home town gave him."

Speaking of this Florence wrote:

"When I read this, Rose, my cheeks burned with shame. To think that I should be responsible for such methods! I do not blame Walter in the least, for he was doing only what he knew was necessary to success. But I am the guilty one, and I cannot forgive myself. Such methods of winning votes in politics are revolting to me. I have a positive horror of them. When I first read that part of the report cold chills ran through me, and when I read on to the end I found myself shivering with a cold and dreary horror. Yet after calmly studying it out and carefully analyzing my feelings I found that this news, which I fully believed, had not changed my love for Walter in the least. The horror I had of the sickening details was due to its being

ROSE GETS A LETTER

brought so close to me by seeing Walter thus deeply tangled in the web through my own wanton folly in asking him to attempt the defeat of Congressman Hinckley."

Florence's admiration for Walter and her ardent hope that he should have a distinguished career were set forth in this singular letter, and with it her apparent conviction that to gain distinction in politics and to reach the position where his high talents could be put to their fullest use for the benefit of his fellow men, Walter would be obliged to resort to practices which were utterly repugnant to her, and which would render it impossible that she should become his wife.

"It is this that troubles me, Rose, dear; I cannot bear the thought of being brought so close to these things as I would be should I become the wife of Walter Crane. I know that the wives of politicians either keep themselves ignorant of what their husbands do, or pretend to be ignorant; but I cannot do that. If I should marry, I would feel that I was in duty bound to take a share of the responsibility for the necessary acts of my husband, or the acts he deemed necessary

HIRAM BLAIR

to bring success and happiness to our lives. I could not bear to think my husband was struggling with the hard problems of life, and keeping me in ignorance so that my life should be peaceful and undisturbed.

"In my reading somewhere I have seen a description of a weapon in use in certain parts of Australia, called a 'boomerang,' which is as peculiar as its name, and it seems to fittingly symbolize my experience in politics. The 'boomerang' is a curiously shaped instrument which, when skilfully thrown, in case it does not strike its object, will describe a circle and return to the point from which it is thrown. When thrown by one who is unskilful or inexperienced it is likely to turn suddenly and fly backward to strike and injure the thrower.

"By reason of the peculiarity of the weapon its name has recently come into use, so I am told, to describe any political movement which results disastrously to its sponsors, as my first venture into politics has done.

"I have certainly thrown my 'boomerang' unskilfully and injured myself more than any one else. My wanton folly has wreaked its own

ROSE GETS A LETTER

vengeance and I am doomed to continue to suffer. Perhaps I deserve it, at all events I am trying to school myself to accept with resignation the wonderfully changed situation in which I find myself."

CHAPTER XLVII

ON THE TRAIL OF THE FUGITIVE

THREE days after Walter Crane was taken home from New Boston in the deadly grip of brain fever, Hiram Blair dropped hurriedly off a train before it stopped at the New Boston station, and went lumbering up the street, scarcely looking at the people he met, and never once halting his steps until he stood at the door of George Jenkins' house.

The day was warm, and the doors were open, so he walked in unannounced. Rose Jenkins was at work in the sitting-room. Without waiting for an invitation he dropped into a chair and began talking:

"Miss Jenkins, we've got to find that Bassett gal and take her to Walt Crane or he won't git well."

"Why, Mr. Blair, is he so dangerously ill?"

"Out of his head most all the time; can't keep the fever down. Doctor says he wuz under

ON THE TRAIL OF THE FUGITIVE

too great a strain after his bust up with Miss Bassett, havin' the campaign on his hands, an' no chanst to rest. He talks erbout her all the time when he 's outen his head; seems like there 's somethin' 'bout you she hain't ben told —"

Rose burst into tears before Hiram finished. He was confused, woman's tears being beyond him, but he was too much in earnest to be long dismayed.

"There, there, Miss Jenkins, cryin' won't do any good; I feel like cryin' myself, but we've got to git our heads together an' find that Bassett gal. So you must help me."

"What can I do, Mr. Blair?" Rose dried her tears quickly when she saw a chance to be of service.

"You can go right away an' git Bassett's hired gal, an' bring her here, an' we'll talk to her. I'm goin' to the postoffice to see what I kin find out. Don't let the woman keep you waitin' while she primps, but fetch her right along."

Rose set out immediately. Hiram went to the postoffice and made diligent inquiry as to the mail of the Bassetts and where they received letters from, but was able to obtain very little

HIRAM BLAIR

information. He rushed back to the Jenkins' house swearing under his breath at the postmaster.

"These here little pinhead postmasters know all erbout a feller's bizness 'cept what they had oughter know," he growled to himself as he hastened back.

All the housemaid knew was that Mrs. Bassett had a sister named Mrs. Maria West somewhere in Kentucky, and she had been talking for a year or more of visiting her, but had never been able to make up her mind to go when the time came. Mrs. West was the only sister Mrs. Bassett had. They did n't write very often and she did n't know where Mrs. West lived. She had heard Mrs. Bassett mention the name of the town, but had paid no attention to it and could not remember it.

By the exercise of much diplomacy and giving the housemaid a slight token of esteem he was far from feeling, Hiram persuaded her to permit him and Rose to make a search of the Bassett house for letters that might disclose the whereabouts of this sister or other relatives.

No letters were found. The search ended with

ON THE TRAIL OF THE FUGITIVE

a secretary locked fast, which resisted all efforts to pick the lock or to unlock it with any keys that could be found about the house.

"I 'll bet a hoss there's some letters in that desk," Hiram grumbled, glaring at it as if it was a mortal enemy. "I hate to break it, but if wust comes to wust, we 'll hev to git it apart somehow."

Hiram followed the slight clew he had by going to the railroad ticket office where he found that Colonel Bassett had before leaving purchased three tickets for Louisville. This convinced Hiram they were in Kentucky, and more than likely at Mrs. West's, as it was not probable they would make as long a stay with a more distant relative. This took him back to the post-office. He conjured up a story that some very important information vitally concerning Colonel Bassett had come to him privately which the Colonel must know at once, and after swearing the postmaster to the strictest secrecy, he confided to him the information in order to whet his interest and refresh his memory. This story had no stronger foundation than Hiram's imagination, but it served its purpose in a measure. Hiram told the postmaster afterwards, when

HIRAM BLAIR

reproached for his deceit, that he was so terribly rattled that day and needed to find the Bassetts so badly he actually believed the story he was telling him was true.

The postmaster, with the combined assistance of his wife and the young lady clerk, was able to recollect that the Bassetts sent letters at long intervals to a Mrs. Maria West in Kentucky to a town with a name something like Lawrenceville or Crawfordsville, they were sure it ended with "ville," but they were sure of nothing else.

With this meagre information Hiram made all haste to the telegraph office. The operator was half asleep, but he was wide awake in a minute after Hiram reached the office.

"Here, mister, git a move on you an' send this message quick to every office in Kentucky that's got a name endin' in 'ville'!"

He threw the message he had written in front of the operator, who looked at him wildly, clearly doubting his sanity. The message read:

"Postmaster, ———ville, Ky.:

"Wire immediately, my expense, if Maria West lives there.

"HIRAM BLAIR, Sheriff."

[414]

ON THE TRAIL OF THE FUGITIVE

It was not until Hiram had emptied his pockets of money to pay for the messages that the operator would believe he was in earnest. He counted up the number of towns and named the charge. Hiram remarked ruefully.

"I never knowed before how expensive the fool notion of puttin' frills on towns' names might be. Ef I wuz n't afeerd Walt would n't like it, I 'd shove thet money back in my pocket, an' bust open thet desk. I could buy 'em a new one fer less'n half what these trailers 'll cost."

He was deluged all afternoon with telegrams informing him that no Maria West lived in the towns from which they came. Just as he was about to give up hope and go after Rose Jenkins to ask her to help him bear the responsibility of breaking open the secretory, a telegram came from Waltonville, Kentucky, which gladdened his heart. It contained just one word in addition to the address and the signature, but that one word was "Yes."

The next morning found Hiram in Waltonville, a little Kentucky hamlet, back in the hills, old, quiet, and unprogressive, seldom visited by strangers. It was admirably suited to the plan

HIRAM BLAIR

of Florence Bassett, for it came as near being out of the world as any place could be, and still be reached by a railroad. Hiram had no trouble in finding some one to direct him to Mrs. West's. Everybody knew everybody else in Waltonville, and just where they lived. The West home was a neat but unpretentious cottage near the end of the principal street. As Hiram walked towards the house he began to feel at home. He saw the old-fashioned well sweep, with the oaken bucket hanging in the well, such as he had drunk out of at his old home so many times, and the familiar gourd hanging beside it. There was the bench at the side of the house with the wash-pans leaning against the wall, showing that it was the habit of this household to make their toilets in the open air as Hiram had always done before he moved to New Boston. He felt sure of his ground as he trudged up the stone walk between rows of native flowers, and stepped upon the vine-clad porch. In answer to his knock a sweet-faced lady of some fifty years opened the door and at once invited him into the house.

ON THE TRAIL OF THE FUGITIVE

"Air you Mrs. Maria West?" Hiram asked, before accepting the invitation.

"Yes, that is my name. Can I do anything for you, sir? Please take a chair."

"Mrs. West, I am Hiram Blair. I come from New Bosting, where your sister, Mrs. Colonel Bassett lives; I think they air here, an' I mus' see Miss Bassett ef she's here, or know where she is. It's a matter of life an' death, Mrs. West, an' I kin tell by lookin' at you thet you will help me."

Then Hiram told in his simple fashion the events that led up to his visit to Waltonville. Mrs. West was plainly affected and Hiram knew he had her sympathy.

"Poor Florence," she murmured; "she does have so much to bear. They have n't told me much, but I knew there was something troubling her. Yes, they were here, but they've gone out to the country to visit my husband's brother, John West. It's ten miles out, on the turn-pike. They won't be back here for a week. I do hope your friend will get well."

"Is there a livery stable in Waltonville where

HIRAM BLAIR

I kin get a two-hoss buggy to go out there right away?"

"No, I 'm afraid you can't find a good team for hire in Waltonville. There's a man who lets out a horse and buggy once in a while, but his horses are so slow you could n't get out to Brother John's and back to-day. We've got a good team of driving horses in the stable, but all the men folks are away, and —"

"Ef you 'll let me take 'em, Mrs. West, I 'll hitch 'em up, an' be a thousan' times obleeged to you. Just show me where they air, an' ef you don't mind trusting 'em to me, I 'll be off in no time."

Mrs. West did not waver in her hospitality, and after heartily thanking her for her kindness, Hiram within a few minutes turned the spirited Kentucky horses into the turnpike, and gave them their heads.

CHAPTER XLVIII

A RACE WITH DEATH

FLORENCE BASSETT was in the yard in front of the West homestead when Hiram drove up the road and turned into the wide gate, scarcely slackening the speed of the team. She had seen him coming at quite a distance and before he turned in she recognized him. A feeling of dread took possession of her, yet it was mingled with a passionate yearning to hear what he had to say. She instinctively knew he was coming to see her, and she felt that he came from Walter. This meant that Walter could not come himself, and the thought flashed through her mind like a wintry blast, freezing her blood and stopping the beating of her heart. For an instant she stood as if chained to the spot, while cold chills enveloped her and her heart lay as a leaden weight in her breast. Then she was inspired by an impulse to know at once what was the terrible message Hiram

HIRAM BLAIR

brought, and she walked rapidly out to meet him.

Hiram jumped out of the buggy and tied the horses before he spoke. Then he greeted Florence in his usual manner.

"Good mornin', Miss Bassett, fine mornin', hope you air well."

"What in the world brings you here, Mr. Blair? Has something terrible happened?"

"Let's go over and set down on that bench by the tree." Hiram led the way to the bench, and unable to restrain himself longer, burst out:

"Miss Bassett, Walt Crane is down with brain fever, an' won't git well onless you go to him. I've come after you."

The thunderbolt had fallen; Florence wondered how she could be so calm and yet feel so terribly miserable. Tears would not come to soothe her anguish, but she turned a face pallid and wretched to Hiram, speechless, mutely pleading with him to tell her more. He went on:

"Walt come over to New Bosting after the primary on a train that don't stop an' he got bunged up some gittin' off. Monday when he started home he fell all in a heap at the deepo

A RACE WITH DEATH

an' we took him home. Mrs. Dougherty, God bless her, is doin' all she kin — she 's his landlady — an' we got a nurse from Indynapolis, but he ain't mendin' none. Outer his head mos' all the time an' talkin' 'bout you. Jus' rages 'cause he did n't come to see you 'fore you left. Somethin' 'bout Rose Jenkins, too, thet they did n't tell you, an' he blames hisself fer thet; could n't get the run of thet, but it 's somethin' 'bout Rose meetin' him to try and fix it up betwixt you an' him. Did n't hev time to ask Rose 'bout it."

"Is he delirious all the time?" Florence found her voice at last. It sounded sepulchral and hollow to her, and Hiram was startled when she spoke.

"Purty nigh all the time. Hez spells of a few minits at a time when he knows what he 's doin'. Queer thing, he never talks 'bout the campaign when he 's ravin' but jes' ez soon 's he comes to an' knows me, he goes to talkin' 'bout the convention. It 's always you he worries 'bout when he 's ravin'."

"Do you think we can save him?"

"Doctor sez nothin' else will do any good. He kain't cool the fever down at all."

HIRAM BLAIR

"My father and mother are away for the day. They've gone to a friend's two miles down the turnpike and won't be back until evening."

"Miss Bassett,"—Hiram's tone was positive, even commanding—"it's ten miles to the village, and the train back starts in a hour an' a half. I made it out here in a hour. Put what you need in a carpet-bag, leave a note fer your ma and git into the buggy. We'll stop at Mrs. West's in town, an' tell her to send your trunk. There's not a minit to be lost. You go into the house an' git ready in ten minits an' I'll water the hosses."

Florence's wan face lighted with the suspicion of a smile at Hiram's commanding way, and she shot him a glance of gratitude as she hastened to obey him.

They were bowling along toward Waltonville as fast as Hiram could urge the horses before either spoke another word. In less than the ten minutes Hiram gave her Florence had rushed into the house, packed a small travelling bag and left a note for her mother. To the members of the West family at the farmhouse she merely said she was going to Waltonville and would not be

A RACE WITH DEATH

back for dinner, leaving all to be explained when her mother read the note. At length Florence broke the silence:

"How did you ever find me, Mr. Blair?"

"That's kinder in my line, Miss Bassett, trackin' fugitives. I jest had to find you, an' when a man hez to do a thing he thinks a heap faster an' funder than when he kin git erlong without it."

Hiram related the means he had taken to locate her, not leaving out the designs he had on the secretary if all else had failed.

"By the way, Miss Bassett, I reckon I owe you a apology. I read your letter to Rose Jenkins an' after I apologize fer readin' it I'm goin' to talk to you 'bout it. I don't agree with you, an' I've got to tell you what I think."

Florence was too much troubled to defend her position, and if the truth were known, more than half anxious to have the folly of her course shown to her. She made no reply and Hiram continued:

"Miss Bassett, I'm a common greenhorn, an' all the eddycashun I got nearly wuz from drivin' a yoke of oxen to the plough an' swappin' hosses

HIRAM BLAIR

ez soon 's I got big enuff. I ain't no lady's man, an' oughten ter dabble in this mess, but I 'm into it now, an' hev to work my way out the best way I kin. Besides, I 've always figgered thet drivin' oxen sorter fitted a feller purty good fer man-agin' a wife an' fambly, an' swappin' hosses wuz good trainin' fer bizness an' polyticks. So mebbe I kin tell you some things you hain't thought of.

"I sorter suspect p'r'aps I know the ins and outs of Walt Crane better 'n you do. He 's the honestest, straightest, kind-heartedest, truest, and bravest man I ever set my eyes on. Ef a friend of his wuz gittin' licked at the fur corner of a fenced field, he 'd jump the fence an' tromp down some other feller's crop to git there quick. He 'd not go clean round the outside of the field fer fear of doin' somethin' wrong. He ain't thet kind of a cuss, but when it comes to bein' square, no man that wuz ever made out of mud hez got him bested. He done all them things thet newspaper feller of yourn sed he done an' ef he had n't he 'd 'a' ben a quitter and a traitor. He 'd 'a' ben a traitor to ol' man Houston, to me and to you, fer while you 'd quit us, you 'd never sent

A RACE WITH DEATH

that reporter feller there ef your heart had n't ben right without your knowin' it.

"The fellers thet thinks they air too high-minded to go cross-lots onct in a spell to gain their points is usually fellers thet hain't the brains to think of smart things to do. There ain't no full-blooded man livin', Miss Bassett, thet kin keep all ten of the commandments all the time."

Florence was silent, but in some way she made Hiram know that she wished him to proceed. Occasionally she would wipe away a tear, and at other times she would smile a weak, wan smile at some droll expression of Hiram's. He was thoroughly in earnest and had not the least thought of being otherwise than serious.

"Hoss tradin' an' polyticks is ez like ez two peas, Miss Bassett," Hiram went on after a pause during which he had searched his pockets for a cigar, the search being fruitless; and then had gravely gotten up and changed sides of the buggy seat with Florence so that the wind would blow away from her instead of toward her, after which precaution he fished out his cob pipe and looked at Florence both inquiringly and appealingly. She merely nodded assent, and he quickly

HIRAM BLAIR

filled and lighted his pipe. "Men seem to think thet they hev a license to beat one another in them two occypashuns. It's jes' natjeral; they kain't help it. Why, Miss Bassett, ef Saint Paul wuz to come back on airth an' offer me a hoss, sayin' it wuz a six-year-old, the fust thing I'd do would be to look at its teeth. An' ef Tom Jefferson, Andy Jackson and Steve Douglas wuz to come back an' run a 'lection, an' I knowed they wuz ag'in' me, I'd want Walt Crane to watch 'em count the votes.

"It's jus' like this, Miss Bassett; you must n't expect too much of a man, an' you must n't expect too much of yourself. Walt is a leetle too honest an' high-strung ever to make a big success in life, but he'll make his mark, an' he won't never be caught doin' any low-down tricks. He'll always be able to look men straight in the eyes an' answer to them fer what he's done. He loves you, too, out of all reason. I tried to talk him out of it, but it wuz n't no use. Ez fer you, you've got plenty of good common sense thet will wear out them hifalutin' notions you wuz givin' way to when you run away frum your duty, an' when you writ thet letter. Wimmen is like

A RACE WITH DEATH

hosses — they 're a mighty sight harder to manage when they 're thoroughbreds an' full of spirit and intellygence. But when onct a feller gits them broke to double harness they settle down an' make up fer all the extry trouble of breakin' 'em.

“So I 'm cert'in you an' me is goin' to pull Walt through an' you two will know one another better fer this split-up — here we air at your aunt's. I tol' her what I wanted with you, so you need n't stop long. It 's only a quarter of a hour tell train time.”

CHAPTER XLIX

GETTING OUT OF WALTONVILLE

AT the Waltonville railroad station Hiram found the ticket agent, who was also telegraph operator, baggage master and postmaster, awaiting him, all excitement. Two unusually important events had occurred to the village of Waltonville in one day — a stranger from the North had visited the village and a telegram had been received.

Without waiting to ask questions the agent approached Hiram as soon as he alighted from the buggy and thrust the message into his hand with "A telygram for you, Colonel."

Hiram hastily read the message, and handed it to Florence. It was from Walter's physician, and read:

"No marked change. Must reduce fever in twenty-four hours."

Turning to the agent Hiram put his hand in a cordial way on the Southerner's shoulder and

GETTING OUT OF WALTONVILLE

in his most persuasive manner said to him: "Colonel, won't you please flag the train goin' up, an' ef it 's behind time, do your best to find out how much, so 's we kin tell whether to wait here for it."

Fortunately the train was on time, and within a few minutes Hiram and Florence had boarded it.

The race with death was started. As the train moved on through the peaceful blue-grass regions of Kentucky, the landscape presented scenes of surpassing beauty and exquisite variety, but the travellers saw nothing as they gazed steadily out the car windows except the mile posts which told them how the distance was being wiped out between them and the room where their friend and lover was making his fight against death. Neither spoke for a long time. Hiram, always inspired to talkativeness when driving over country roads, was depressed and silent now that he was on the train. It was a part of his nature always to appear hopeful and in good spirits when he was working toward the accomplishment of any object, no matter what trouble might be on his mind. When he was engaged in the effort

HIRAM BLAIR

to find Florence and get her aboard the train on the way to save the life of his dearest friend, he felt that he must not give way to his feelings or he would lose some of the energy and determination so vitally necessary to success. Therefore, he made himself believe that Walter's life would be saved and that the occasion was one for good humor and hopeful spirits rather than for dismal forebodings of dangers they were doing all in their power to avert.

On the train, all work done, Hiram found himself helpless, at the complete mercy of men and machinery over which he had no control. Nothing that he might think or say or do would either hasten their going or prolong the life they were on their way to save. Hiram sat silent and dejected. At last, rousing himself with an effort, he stammered:

"Scuse me, Miss Bassett, I oughter hev tol' you! We 'll git in Louisville at half-past seven, and leave at eight fer Morrison. Train 's due there 'bout midnight. We 're on time, an' kain't lose any onless there 's a accident. Schedule of this train 's fixed ez slow ez it kin go." Then he relapsed into silence again, relieved only by

GETTING OUT OF WALTONVILLE

taking out his watch and comparing the time with the railroad time table at every stop the train made.

Florence next broke the silence. It was clear she was in doubt whether to say what she had in her mind, for she had several times started to speak but reconsidered and resumed her sombre gaze through the car window. It was with an effort that she spoke.

"Mr. Blair, you mentioned something that Mr. Crane said in his delirium about Rose Jenkins, and I did n't understand it. Can you remember what it was?"

"I disremember jes' what he said, Miss Bassett, but it wuz somethin' 'bout seein' her some time that he wuz worryin' 'cause he had n't tol' you 'bout it. I think it wuz the time we sent him to Indynapolis after them Senate Journals — the mornin' after, you know — so's to keep him busy an' keep his mind off his troubles. Seein' how it's turned out, maybe it would hev ben better fer him not to hev gone, but I did n't know it then. It takes a mighty smart man to know what's best to do all the time, an' Dave Hinckley had us in close quarters 'bout thet time;

HIRAM BLAIR

spechally when he got you harnessed up with 'em. Course, I'm not blamin' you, 'cause you only done what you thought was right. You see, Walt is one of them conscenhus kind an' takes ev'rythin' to heart so. I set up with him that night tell train time, tellin' him foolish stories, so 's to git him in good speerits, an' I heerd somewhere's that Rose Jenkins went up to Pittsfield an' helped him work on the Journals, an' from the way he talks when he's outen his head, I reckon he tol' her not to say nothin' to you 'bout it. I kinder reckon he wanted to tell you hisself and never got no chance. You ain't seed him sence, hev you?"

"No," she answered, simply.

CHAPTER L

IN THE SICK CHAMBER

THE remainder of the homeward journey was made without incident. They changed cars safely in Louisville and reached Morrison as Hiram had promised, only a few minutes after midnight. A carriage was waiting, and through Hiram's thoughtfulness Mrs. Dougherty was inside it to welcome Florence. Hiram conducted her to the carriage, introduced her to the kind-hearted Irish lady, and insisted on climbing up beside the driver. Mrs. Dougherty affectionately took Florence in her arms and without waiting for her to ask any questions, began:

"He's still alive, darlin', and now I'm sure he'll get well. It's God's blessin' Sheriff Blair found you as soon's he did. I've ben prayin' every minit of the time since he left that the Virgin Mary'd show him the way to where you was, an' she did, glory be to God! It makes my

HIRAM BLAIR

heart sick, dear, to see the pore boy lyin' there, wild an' cryin' out so, an' we pore helpless critters not able to do a blessed thing for him. An' him such a noble, high-speerited, intelligent young man — an' so kind an' gentle. Niver a cross word out of him since he 's ben in my house, nigh onto four years now. I think as much of him as if he was my own son."

Florence felt that unconsciously a bond of the strongest sympathy had asserted itself and brought her very close to this honest-hearted woman. It was with a wonderful feeling of relief that she rested her head on Mrs. Dougherty's broad shoulder and allowed the tears so long repressed to flow freely.

Mrs. Dougherty with true woman's instinct knew that this giving way to her feelings would strengthen Florence for the trying ordeal before her, and she made no effort to dissuade her, but went on:

"Mr. Blair sent to Indynapolis fer a fine trained nurse, an' all of us is doin' everythin' we can, but seems like nothin' we can do makes any diff'runce. Mr. Blair, pore man, has n't had his clothes off sence he brought Mr. Crane home last

IN THE SICK CHAMBER

Monday an' here it is Saturday morning; afore he left he 'd worry us to death wantin' to do somethin' for the pore sick boy, an' runnin' to the doctor to see if there wuz n't somethin' he could do that he had n't tried yet. He went an' got all the doctors in town that would speak to one another to all come together, but it was jus' the same; the pore boy kep' gittin' worse and worse."

Florence's tears were dried when they reached the house. Mrs. Dougherty took her directly to the sick room where the nurse was sitting by the bedside. The nurse rose with a quick smile of welcome.

"Miss Bassett, I presume. It is providential that you have come. He is quiet now, but is not rational and will not recognize you. In a short time he is likely to begin talking in his delirium, but he is one of those good-dispositioned persons who do not become violent even in delirium. There is no danger; you may take my place now, and I will rest an hour on the couch in the next room unless I am needed. He will not require medicine now until he has a lucid period, and you can keep these ice bags in position. If he should go to sleep, remain with him constantly as he

HIRAM BLAIR

usually awakes in his right mind, and the doctor says it is important he should recognize you as early as possible."

Florence sat at the side of the bed and placing one hand on Walter's burning forehead, took his hand in the other, only removing it occasionally to place small pieces of ice between his parched lips or to move the ice bags. Mrs. Dougherty, feeling that Florence needed to have some one with her, sat silently near the foot of the bed, occasionally dozing, but quickly rousing herself. Soon Walter began talking in his delirium, calling out that he must go and find Florence. He attempted to arise, but was gently repressed by Florence and Mrs. Dougherty who came quickly to her aid. The effort to arise exhausted the sufferer and he was quiet for a time. Then he began going over his campaign speeches. Mrs. Dougherty roused up and exclaimed: "Glory be! He's talkin' politics. The doctor said if he ever would get away from that one subject he'd be easier."

The speech over, peace came to the troubled brain. His eyes closed in sleep. Florence sat close and watched him without taking her eyes

IN THE SICK CHAMBER

away from his face, fearful that he might awake with a fleeting spark of intelligence and she would miss it. The nurse came in, having rested long past the hour she had given herself, but seeing that Walter was asleep and Florence vigilant at her post, she replenished the ice bags and returned to her couch.

Toward daylight Hiram came in and stood beside the bed a moment, gazing steadfastly at the picture before him with a look of honest satisfaction upon his rough and worn features. Then he tiptoed to Mrs. Dougherty, touched her on the shoulder and pointed to the door at the same time showing her his watch. He took her place in the chair as she went to catch a brief rest before the duties of the day began. Except for these interruptions the vigil was tense and silent, the only sound being the ticking of the clock on the mantel telling off the seconds of inexorable time as it carried them onward toward that inevitable moment when the spark of life should either be kindled into strength or flash out and leave all in darkness.

At a signal from Florence, given by a slight movement of her head toward the shaded lamp,

HIRAM BLAIR

Hiram went to the window and threw open the blinds to let in the rays of the rising sun. He took the lamp in his hand and quietly carried it out of the sick room, extinguishing the flame after he was outside. Then he came in and walked back to the window where he stood silently looking out. It was a glorious June morning. The sun was rising in royal beauty, beaming upon the world a promise of joyous, inspiring warmth. The dewdrops caught up the sunbeams and threw them back in thousands of glistening rays, and the flowers lifted up their heads to share in the bounty of God's imperial messenger of goodwill to mankind. The awakening birds poured forth their melodious welcome to the rising sun, and day burst forth in all its divine splendor.

As Hiram turned from the window the rays of sunshine fell full upon Walter's face, and he opened his eyes. Looking steadily, intensely at him every instant Florence's earnest gaze caught his and a bright gleam of intelligence sprang for an instant into his eyes. One word only passed his lips, but it was fraught with wondrous glad tidings to those faithful watchers at his bedside, for the word he spoke was, "Florence."



**A GLEAM OF INTELLIGENCE SPRANG FOR AN INSTANT INTO
HIS EYES**



CHAPTER LI

THE CLOUDS ROLL BY

WALTER fell into a deep sleep almost immediately after he recognized Florence, and it was marked by an absence of delirium. Soon the nurse came in, quietly but firmly directing:

"Miss Bassett, you have done all you can do for the present. It is imperative that you take some rest. Go into the room yonder and sleep until Mrs. Dougherty calls you for breakfast. I promise that if you are needed I will call you."

Florence obeyed though she felt it almost impossible to resist the impulse to remain.

The doctor came at nine o'clock. Florence had rested, eaten breakfast and resumed her post when he arrived. He felt Walter's pulse, took his temperature, then breathed a sigh of relief.

"Miss Bassett, you are a better physician than I am. I have been trying five days to reduce his fever and could not. But the danger is not over.

HIRAM BLAIR

The chances are in his favor now, yet constant care and watchfulness are necessary."

As Hiram left the house that morning, Florence handed him a message and asked him to send it to Rose Jenkins.

"You may read it, Mr. Blair," she suggested.

Hiram did not wait for a second invitation. He read:

"Burn that letter and come to me at once."

It is unnecessary to say that Hiram lost no time in despatching the message.

From that day on Walter began to make progress toward convalescence. His progress was slow, halting, and often at a standstill, yet there was a noticeable gain from day to day. He had frequent waking periods when he recognized Florence and showed by his manner how grateful he was for her presence. Still, he was too weak to talk in his lucid periods, the feverish exertions of his wanderings seeming to exhaust his energies. At those times, he would lie quietly and gaze at Florence with eyes that showed depths of unutterable love and joy in her presence.

THE CLOUDS ROLL BY

Thus a week went on. Rose came and spent two days with Florence and they had long confidential talks at times when Walter was sleeping or when the nurse was attending him. In these talks Rose explained why it was she could not tell of her trip to meet Walter because Walter wished to explain all that himself, thinking it would be better so. But this was of little consequence to Florence now. Her trouble had been with herself, and now she had been brought to a clear understanding of herself, of that deeper nature, which had risen to flood-tide and swept away all her doubts and fears and prejudices. When she heard that Walter was near to death and needed her, she was no longer in a doubtful state.

One day when Florence was looking about the sick room she happened to observe on the dresser the package containing her returned presents, still unopened, and lying just as Walter had left it when he went to his room after his trip to New Boston to see her. She took up the package, startled and disappointed at first to see that it was unopened. But as she thought more clearly the unopened package came to her mind as a mute

HIRAM BLAIR

testimonial of Walter's unchanging love and his resolute determination that he would not lose her. Then she pressed the package to her lips and swiftly walked to her room, where she placed it softly in the bottom of her trunk, which Mrs. West had sent to her the day after her departure from Waltonville.

At the end of the week Walter had passed the danger point. His fever had abated, and the attacks of delirium were at an end. The doctor still refused him permission to talk or to see any one except his faithful nurses and positively forbade Hiram talking to him about politics or business.

One day when the doctor had just gone out after laying particular stress on this injunction, Hiram remarked to Florence:

"That doctor maybe knows a heap more about medicine than I do, but he don't know more about Walt. I reckon good news won't hurt him. Leastways I've come frum New Bosting to tell him, an' here goes. You watch him keerful, an' ef you think he's gittin' overly excited, say so, and I'll dry up."

THE CLOUDS ROLL BY

He sat on the side of the bed. Walter's hand feebly caught his and held it in a warm clasp as Hiram talked in as low a voice as he could command:

"Walt, the congresshunal committy hed a meetin' this mornin', an' they put off the convenshun three weeks so 's you kin be there. Ol' Dave went over to the other keounties in the dees-tryct to get 'em to agree to turn down Sam an' nomynate him anyway, but I sent George Jenkins up to Indynapolis to see Tom Hendricks an' he sent word to his friends in the other keounties thet the voice of the people must be reespected. Looks now like Hendricks wuz goin' to be nomy-nated fer President, and the fellers won't dare to go ag'in' him. So we 're safe enuff now thet you air goin' to be able to git to the convenshun."

If Hiram's explanation harmed Walter at all, it could not be told from his appearance. Hiram softly left the room, and Walter and Florence were alone.

"Florence, there is one more thing I must know," he spoke feebly, but with an intense emotion:

HIRAM BLAIR

"What has become of that package I left on my dresser over yonder?"

"It is in my trunk, Walter."

He opened his arms, and Florence, dropping on her knees by the side of the bed, became enveloped in his loving embrace.

THE END

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